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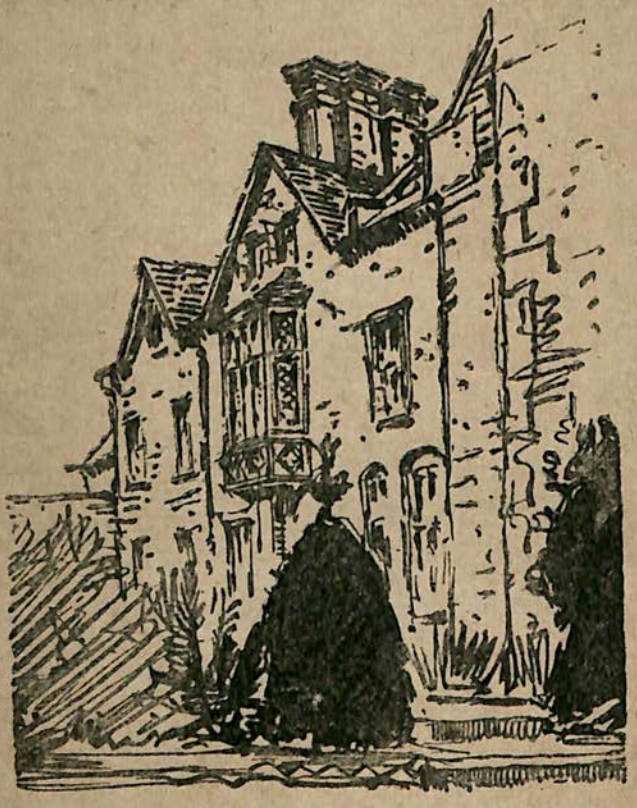

HODNET RECTORY
From a Sketch by Hester Cholmondeley

UNDER ONE ROOF

A FAMILY RECORD

BY MARY CHOLMONDELEY

94634

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1918

94634

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TO

MY BROTHER

TOM

Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit,
Si bleu, si calme !
Un arbre, par-dessus le toit,
Berce sa palme.

La cloche dans le ciel qu'on voit
Doucement tinte.
Un oiseau sur l'arbre qu'on voit
Chante sa plainte.

Mon Dieu, mon Dieu la vie est là,
Simple et tranquille.

INTRODUCTION

As I write these lines the dim London room in which I sit vanishes away, and the old home in the green midlands rises up, the little gabled house on the low hill, where some of us were born, where we all lived as children, where Father, too, had lived as a child, and his father and his grandfather before him.

There we grew to men and women. There Hester's short life was spent. There Mother died.

Hodnet Rectory faces south and turns nearly all its narrow small-paned windows, with their uneven glass, to the sun.

The low tower of the church, Hodnet Hall beyond the glebe, the long, peaceful lines of meadow and park and woodland, and the blue Wrekin against the sky,—we saw them all quaintly tilted and distorted through the uneven glass.

And now, as I read Hester's diary, I seem to be peering in, first through one window and then another, at the busy family life within, seeing it all anew through the clear small wavy panes of her minute record of our daily life.

But, of course, I do not only see it quaintly tilted as she saw it. Indissolubly intertwined throughout with the thread of *her* story is the thread of *my* memory.

It is a grave moment when one looks back into the same past through the eyes of another. How much I remember, how much more I have clean forgotten, until Hester's small upright handwriting recalls it. "It is as if

a wind had blown back the pages of the book of the past."

I do not think that any of us realized in those days that we had "a chiel" —an affectionate but lynx-eyed chiel —"amang us takin' notes." Perhaps it was just as well we did not realize it, had not the remotest suspicion of the critical attitude of her mind towards every one of us, except Father.

After her death we discovered that she had left an enormous mass of manuscript, including a diary in many volumes. All her papers she left to me. We were aware in her lifetime that her weak health had diverted part of her indefatigable energy to pen and paper. But only after she was gone did I realize with amazement the vast amount of her literary work, which in bulk would have done credit to an octogenarian. For several years, as I had leisure I worked, sometimes for months together, at arranging and sorting the great pile of her manuscripts,

reading the diary and making copious extracts from it in the hope of one day writing a memoir of her, and incorporating with it what seemed to be the best of her serried masses of poems, essays, stories.

But I came—possibly wrongly—to the conclusion that the material for such a volume, even after diligent sifting, remained too immature, had not sufficient originality to justify publication. The book would have failed to obtain a hearing. Hester had great gifts, and an indomitable determination and energy, which often go farther in the long run than talent. But she had no time. Before she could sharpen her blade, before she could even disentangle it from the scabbard, it fell from her eager childish hand.

A memoir for private circulation occurred to me as a possibility. But the more I thought of it, the more futile this idea appeared. Who would read it? Hester was known to almost

no one. I could not even muster the names of half a dozen persons outside her own family to whom I could send it. She died a quarter of a century ago, and it is doubtful whether any creature exists who still vividly remembers her, except her brothers and sisters, and the kind sister-in-law to whom she owed so much. They need no biography of her. Her memory is green in their hearts.

I had another fear. I have given my best years to the weaving of romances. With all this quantity of literary material to my hand, I might have been, I *should* have been, tempted to suppress and emphasize, to entwine the myriad parti-coloured threads into a picturesque tapestry with an interesting figure in it, against a sympathetic background. But would that figure be Hester? I came at last to see that if I drew Hester at all, it must be not as a central personage, but as one of a family group. I realized that her

fragile little form had not the strength to stand alone. She needed round her the protecting presences of Father, and Mother, and "Ninny," as she had needed them in life.

I could not paint a full-length portrait of her, but I could perhaps make a pencil sketch of her—and them. This is what I have tried to do.

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FATHER

I

FATHER

FATHER was one of the last representatives of a by-gone class of clergyman of whom probably not one survives now. If he were alive to-day he would be close on ninety.

He remembered as a child travelling by coach and, later on as a boy, journeying under now obsolete circumstances by rail. His mother hired a truck, caused her chariot to be placed on it, and in her chariot she took her seat with her four sons round her, no doubt clad in the blue coats and long white duck trousers in which she made so many sketches of them. She said that it was impossible for her to travel in a railway carriage, as she might find

herself sitting opposite some one with whom she was not acquainted. She refused persistently through life to pay for a railway ticket for herself or her children, and the railway officials never succeeded in making her give way on this point. She announced that she had a right to sit in her own chariot, and triumphantly enforced that right, not only in Shropshire and Cheshire, where she was known, but in her journeys to the north of England. She was a tall, commanding personage,[1] and one can imagine her erect figure seated in dignified state in her travelling carriage raised high on its truck; little realizing the dangers to which some

[1] Mary Heber, an energetic, able woman, married Charles Cholmondeley, Rector of Hodnet. A fine portrait of her by Copley is in my eldest brother's possession. From her brother, Richard Heber of Hodnet Hall, the celebrated book collector, she inherited the Hodnet property for her life. She came into it up to its hilt in debt. She sold the library, took over the management of the property, and at her death it passed, virtually freed from debt, to her niece, Bishop Heber's daughter, Mrs. Heber Percy, grandmother of the present owner.

of her sons were exposing themselves, who on one occasion climbed up into the "rumble," but were prevailed on to come down by the guard, who assured them their heads would be "took off by the tunnels."

Father was still in his teens when his mother died, and he has often told us how she lay in state at Hodnet Hall—the last of our family to do so, with lighted candles at head and foot, and how the village people formed a procession, and walked two and two round the coffin.[1]

Father remembered the trombone and the fiddle still in use in the gallery in country churches. He remembered how the church clock was set by "old Peg,"

[1] In Father's youth there seems to have been considerable formality on some occasions, such as his mother's funeral, and a total disregard of it on others. He once told us, and evidently had not been in the least shocked at the time by the incident, that the smallest funeral he ever took was that of a baby. The only person who attended the service was the nurse, who had walked some distance, and appeared with the dead baby tucked under her arm, coffined in a Colman's mustard box.

presumably the church warden, who used to stroll down to the mail coach occasionally and " take the time " from the driver. Until the railway supervened a comfortable inexactitude as to time seems to have prevailed, and a spacious leisure which saw no cause for haste.

One would have thought the railway must have fully arrived in all its horrid network before Father married, which he did at twenty-seven.[1] Nevertheless one of his cousins presented him with a magnificent carriage, with quantities of large leather trunks strapped all over it, and in it Father and Mother did visit for a few years. But it quickly proved a useless possession, and remained derelict in the coachhouse. I still possess one of its long odd-shaped, unwieldy, but indestructible leather boxes, always called " the imperial."

Father was never given, so far as I can ascertain, any training as a

[1] In 1854.

clergyman. He was ordained, and acted as curate for a short time near Banbury, under a well-meaning, equally untrained Vicar, who was also an Archdeacon, and also the local squire. But he was soon given a small living in Shropshire, and later on became Rector of Hodnet, as his father had been before him, also his maternal grandfather and great-grandfather[1] and his uncle, Bishop Heber, the well-known hymn writer.

His mother had owned Hodnet Hall for her life, and he continued to live at Hodnet after his father's death, until his mother's death. Consequently he had known most of his parishioners from childhood onwards. He and many of the men of the parish had played together as boys, thus forming an intimate and indestructible link between him and his people when he came back to them as their Rector;

[1] His great-grandfather, a notorious pluralist, used to drive over to Hodnet in a coach and four and preach a sermon once a year.

a link which must have been a very common one sixty years ago, but which seems seldom to exist now.

The only clergyman whom I can instance as slightly resembling Father is the Mr. Irwine of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, with his powdered hair and charming manners and benignant countenance, and genial nonchalant interest in his parishioners. But there was no nonchalance about Father, who might have been his son. He belonged to a generation whose conscience was awakening to the responsibilities and opportunities of its position as parish priest, though it had not yet acquired the panoplied organization of the present day.

There seems to have been little or no organization of parish work in Father's youth, or if there was he never came in contact with it. He never did any work in a town. From the time he was ordained no one seems ever to have interfered with him, or to

have questioned him about his methods. He did exactly as he pleased, looking very stately and dignified, and was always treated with great consideration by his Bishop.

He rebuilt Hodnet Boys' School from the ground. He was mainly responsible for the restoration of the church, which he and his cousin, Major Percy of Hodnet Hall, carried out together. He instituted children's services, flower services, services of song, Lenten services, and cottage lectures. He did all the things which other men were also beginning to do. But, even in my own recollection as I became old enough to be associated with his labours, I saw that the work lacked method, or what would be called now organization.

But it was extraordinarily successful. Arrangements which may have been open to criticism somehow worked astonishingly well. Father was the friend of the whole parish, its unifying principle. I cannot assert that he was

a born priest, but he was certainly a peace-maker.[1] The parish with him at its head had a sort of homely but tough freemasonry. It held together, so to speak, of itself. There was in Father a certain combination of qualities backed by good fortune which rendered possible the unique position he attained among his people. He had all the distinction and kindliness of a Mr. Irwine and with it, what Mr. Irwine lacked, an abounding energy which naturally spent itself on his parish. And it was also his good fortune to have inherited a certain tradition from his predecessor and uncle, Bishop Heber.

[1] I have known Father intervene with success in matters of extreme delicacy, as when one of Mrs. Brown's caps spread on her side of the hedge to dry had "got blowed" on to Mrs. Jones's side, and had been appropriated by her; the situation, already grave, having been further complicated by Mrs. Brown actually calling her neighbour "Woman Jones" across the hedge. Possibly no self-respecting person, much less Mrs. Jones, could restore a cap after that. Anyhow Father probed the difficulty, obtained the cap, and took it back himself to Mrs. Brown.

Reginald Heber had lived on terms of lifelong sympathy and friendship with the local nonconformists. Father followed in his footsteps. He made no distinctions between those who attended church and chapel, in the way of helpfulness and kindness. I don't think he felt any difference. We, as children, never realized the gulf which later in life we discovered to exist between Church and Dissent: as indeed we never discovered till much later the gulf between the Church of England and the Church of Rome. Father's elder brother, Charles, had become a Roman Catholic, and used to appear at intervals at Hodnet Rectory, a tall, imposing figure in his soutane, delighting us all with his caustic wit. He was a Canon of Chester and a renowned preacher. We, as children, accepted Father and Uncle Charles, and the nonconformist minister, as all working in the same cause, and, in consequence, belonging in a mysterious

way to each other, like soldiers of different regiments.

Like Bishop Heber before him, Father was closely and personally attached to some of the leading nonconformists in the parish, and they to him. Is there any link so homely and so indestructible as that of having played together as children? Excellent, kindly, God-fearing men they were. Their fine faces rise before me as I write. Father used to say that he thought some of his people needed what the nonconformist form of religion could give them, that it suited certain temperaments. And I have heard him say that he could see no reason why he should not partake of Holy Communion with them. I do not know whether he ever actually did so, but it is quite possible.

They were through life his powerful allies. They shut up their chapels whenever Father had a special service on hand, and all flocked to church. When the church was restored, all the

chapels sent contributions. Even the smallest chapel, belonging to the poorest of the poor, sent six shillings "with their dear love to Mr. Cholmondeley."

At the restoration a new organ was installed, and Father gave the old one (originally presented to Hodnet Church by himself and his brothers) to the chapel at Wollerton. When he held a mission he arranged services, often in the open air, in different districts in his large scattered parish. These services were always opened with prayer by the leading nonconformist of the district, in the presence of the High Church Missioner, that enthusiastic, devoted, eloquent, militant man of unsparing tongue, who drew the people to him in flocks, and then "went for" them. The mission took place at the time of the hay harvest, and the young men used to get up in the dawn to start early with their mowing, so as to allow of their attending the services. We

never had but one mission, but it was long remembered.

He had a great belief in plenty of amusement for old and young, and gave many entertainments to his parishioners. He enjoyed the choir dances quite as much as the choir and their friends. We had a mixed choir, men, women, and boys, and many a time we have danced with about sixty parishioners in the drawing-room of Hodnet Rectory, Father always leading off in the country dance with Mrs. Cross, our principal soprano. My brothers and brother-in-law used to come in their pink hunt coats, and dance all night with the village maidens. What fun it was! And how well every one danced! The village lads used to have quadrille parties in the fields beforehand, till they knew their figures much better than we did.

Father's religion, which was very real to him, had been taken entirely on trust. But it was, nevertheless, a vital

faith to him from first to last, though he almost never spoke to us about it, after he had carefully prepared us for confirmation. I feel sure he never gave a thought to such subjects as the authenticity of the gospels, or apostolic succession. The difficulties which arise out of certain ecclesiastical tenets would have been inconceivable to him. He never troubled himself about such matters; probably never realized them as important factors in the minds of his clerical brethren; never studied the pros and cons of questions which, even in his day, were already vexed questions. He could hold a dogma and preach it without seeing what it entailed. He, the kindest man in the world, believed he believed in everlasting punishment, and did not think any the worse of his Maker in consequence. His sense of humour came to his rescue if his favourite dogmas were attacked. I remember Rowland Corbet, our beloved neighbour, being asked if he

believed in the devil, and his reply, "Believe in him! I would not trust him for a moment."

My Father at once retorted. "Now, Rowland, I won't have that old friend of my childhood taken from me."

"Keep him, my dear Cholmondeley," was the reply. "Keep him, as long as you feel the need of him."

Father's life was uneventful, nor did he take interest in the great happenings of his day. I have never heard him speak of the Crimean War, or the Indian Mutiny, or the Franco-German War. I once questioned him as to what he had felt at the time about these events, and I saw by his puzzled expression that he had no real recollection of them.

He spent almost nothing on himself. He never possessed a dressing-gown until his children got him one, or a fur-lined coat until they gave him one. He was as reckless about his health as

most of his family were about money, and suffered much in old age in consequence.

He was painfully economical in some ways and profusely generous in others. He was, of course, very charitable. What clergyman is not ? [1]

He never spared himself, or learned how to husband his strength, or how to take care of his health, which was always delicate, but which was reinforced by his wonderful energy and elasticity. He had the elasticity of a child, and a child's sweetness, and optimism and trustfulness, and belief

[1] I have had a long experience of the country clergy, and I believe there is no class so charitable, no class so quixotically charitable. I remember well a certain Shropshire Archdeacon. As a curate it had been his duty to visit the cast-off mistress of one of the large landowners of Shropshire, who allowed her three hundred a year. At the man's death his son refused to continue the allowance or any part of it. She was left entirely destitute. The young curate, who had private means himself, paid her the same allowance till her death many years later. This action hampered him during all the years in which he was educating his children, but he did it without flinching, and without speaking of it.

in others. He had also the lack of foresight of a child, and a child's incapacity of mental grasp.

He had not the power of balancing one course of action against another. He would wander down a mental side track. He would shut his eyes to easily averted dangers. He would placidly delay important decisions without perceiving that to make no decision is often the most disastrous course of all. He would reassure himself entirely at the ominous sound of an incoming tide of disaster by saying, "It is always darkest before the dawn." He was a man of small abilities and conventional mind as regards the more important subjects of thought.

In what then lay his undoubted power, for he made a considerable success of life, though not of business matters? He was a great power for good as a clergyman, he was extremely popular as a neighbour, he was devotedly loved by his children and servants and by

nearly all who came into contact with him. He was the means of turning many towards a better life. He was a kind of saint.

If it is a saintly quality to forget injuries, Father possessed it to a supreme degree.

Uncomfortable, or disturbing, incidents slipped out of his mind, that extraordinarily retentive mind where a piece of china, or a picture, or a relationship was concerned. He had a unique power of forgetting the things which we should all do well to forget, but which some of us, alas! brood over in sleepless nights, and bottle up in phials of rancour. He had a lifelong affection for a rich man who, on a certain occasion, took advantage of a hitch in a legal document to endeavour to evade the repayment of certain moneys owing to Father. My eldest brother intervened. An eminent lawyer was consulted, who decided in Father's favour, and the money, the loan of

which could not be denied, never was denied,' was finally repaid. But it was typical of Father that his affection for the would-be despoiler was never even momentarily clouded by what some might have found difficult to condone. He owned it was "strange of ——" and promptly forgot the sinister incident altogether.

There is no doubt that part of Father's power lay in his childlikeness. The childlike nature often leads, not because it wants to lead, but because others will follow it. It is this element in certain people which we surly bears and cross-grained mules recognize, and allow to guide us. Father seldom ordered. He was seldom opposed. And the childlike element in him drew forth also a protective instinct in others, in his children especially, and in a minor degree in most of those who worked for him.

I recollect on one occasion his two churchwardens coming to consult me

anent a somewhat thorny subject of expense. Their kind faces became as flint as they said, "We have made up our minds we shall not allow the Rector to give more than a certain sum."

Are there still churchwardens anywhere in the world who protect their open-handed Rector as ours used to protect Father?

If there was any action of his which was adversely criticized, it was his instituting afternoon communion services for those unable to attend earlier in the day, but it was characteristic of him that he never mentioned that these services were held by the advice of his bishop, whom he had consulted on the subject.

Surely gaiety and charm are saintly qualities. Anyhow Father possessed them. He had the happiest temperament I have ever met. If it is a saintly quality to be tender-hearted, Father was a saint. He was never deaf to an

appeal for help, even if it was not genuine, or to any cry of distress.

Looking back at the past it seems as if he had enough on his hands with a paralysed wife, eight children to educate, one of them an invalid, for I had been more or less crippled by acute asthma from childhood. But, nevertheless, he did not hesitate to take into his house an aged and eccentric and hopelessly extravagant aunt, when she had got herself firmly embedded into money difficulties. He went down to Torquay, where she lived, settled her debts, wound up her affairs, and brought her home. He told me he had paid a bill of forty pounds at the chemist's alone, mainly for scent. She made her home with us for years, and, finally, settled in rooms near us in the village.

Poor Aunt G.! My principal recollection of her is that she immediately cut into small pieces the warm underclothing I provided for her, as she had

none. When she was dying in considerable suffering, she said suddenly, "Georgiana, behave yourself," drew herself up, and met her death with fortitude.

After Aunt G. Father made a home for his elder brother, Reginald, in his impoverished days, who had had a stroke, and had also been insanely extravagant. Uncle Reggie was sweet-tempered, genial, and of majestic appearance, but totally unaccustomed to small households and restricted means, and quite incapable of managing his own affairs. Perhaps Father was more kind than wise in taking this extra burden, for it was a heavy one, upon himself and his family. But he did take it for years; and, finally, Uncle Reggie followed Aunt G. to the rooms in the village close at hand, and lived there assiduously arranging his collection of butterflies and beetles till his death.

But Father's ears were open to the cry of distress not only of human beings,

but of tiny animals. One childish recollection is so vivid that I see it as if it were yesterday.

It is a resplendent June morning, and through the open window of the schoolroom comes the sudden harsh cry of a young thrush caught in the strawberry nets, that netting all made by Father's careful, indefatigable hands. I run to the window just in time to see the black-and-white stable cat, attracted by the cry, glide over the low wall, and creep hastily towards the strawberry beds. A moment later I see Father's tall, slender figure emerging from his study, hastening in the same direction. He, too, has heard the appeal for help. How often I have watched him with patient, deft hands disentangle a flouncing young bird, jabbing at him with yellow beak all the time; or, if the poor thing was hopelessly noosed, he would get out his knife with a sigh and reluctantly cut his beloved netting.

FATHER'S RELATIONS WITH HIS CHILDREN

How fragmentary these notes are, and as I read them again how incomplete they seem, for I have not even touched on Father's relation with his children,[1] and it is, of course, in that relation that he loomed so large in our lives, that he is still enshrined in our memories.

I seldom think of him now as I constantly saw him in his last years, sitting, white-haired, feeble, and dignified, in his armchair by the fire in his London home.

My mind goes back to him as a young man, a delightful adored companion, singing to us all manner of gay or bloodthirsty little songs, accompanying himself at the piano. We

[1] There were eight of us: Tom, Regie, Mary, Essex, Dick, Diana, Victoria, and Hester.

liked the bloodthirsty songs best, of course. There was one which began, regardless of grammar:

Oh! Fox, you've stole my goose away,

which was an especial favourite.

I can only remember the last two verses.

So! Master Fox, pray take advice,
Of thievish tricks have done,
Or else the keeper I will fetch
To shoot you with his gun.

His long and rusty gun he'll bring
And shoot you through the head.

A loud chord emphasized the discharge of the weapon, followed by a wild realistic scuffle of notes—

The blood will then run down your face—

Solemn, muffled chords, the last words becoming slower and slower—

And you—will—be—quite—dead.

One of my earliest recollections of Father is his taking me out on a pony

in a leading rein, and putting the pony to a canter, while he ran beside it with unflagging agility. I, in the seventh heaven of delight, could only gasp out "Quicker, quicker!" whenever he showed signs of slackening. I was always furious with him when he stopped at last.

His fingers were deftness itself. Even as children we admired his long, beautiful, sensitive hands. He had a great art in making a doll's clothes sit well upon her. A sawdust or a china figure were alike to him.

He made a toy theatre, painted the scenery, and acted five-act plays with dolls. Mother wrote the plays and he "produced" them.

The little theatre had wings and elaborate, painted scenes and houses with windows and doors that opened, and side pieces for each act. One scene was a nursery with beds in it, and the children being put to bed by their nurse. But we were much more

impressed by a sea piece in which a ship appeared, which sailed across the waves, till it passed behind a rock. Then it reappeared much smaller and farther away, and sailed back across the sea once more. And, when the ship was gone, the stage was darkened, a match scratched behind the scenes, and the moon came out suddenly and made a silvery pathway across the now empty ocean.

The favourite scene of all was Hodnet Rectory seen from the garden by night, with the windows lit up. We knew every window. And myriads of fairies, some pink, some white, came dancing up and down, singing (in Mother's voice) in the moonlight.

The plays still seem to me very good and dramatic. They were written in an easy, flowing verse. They made a great appeal to our imagination as children.

A few years ago at a London luncheon party a bronzed, middle-aged soldier came up and introduced himself to me,

and poured forth enthusiastic reminiscences of one of these doll plays, at which he had been present at the age of five.

In later years these plays were performed by us for the benefit of Father's grandchildren. The grandchildren do them now. A new theatre has been made on the lines of the old one. But the original one still remains in my brother's house.

We were taught to dance before I was old enough to remember beginning to learn. Every year Miss Summers, that delightful personage who taught all Shropshire, used to come and stay with us for a week, or a fortnight, and instruct us in minuets, Highland dances, Irish jigs, every description of dance ancient and modern.

He taught all his children, except myself, to play lawn tennis well. He had been an excellent player at real tennis.

He taught us all to skate, and most

of us learned from him to do quantities of intricate and combined figures. He was an admirable skater himself, and was affectionately called "Cholmondeley on turns," by the ardent skaters of Shropshire. He took indefatigable pains with all of us, though it must have been a sacrifice to hold us up hour by hour when the ice was good, for skating was one of his few forms of active recreation. We little realized how unselfish he was in that, as in many other things.

As we grew older he found time in the mornings to ground us in Stanley, Butler, and Paley. In the evenings he read to us Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Miss Edgeworth, Jane Austen, and Stevenson. Gradually he associated us with him in all his parish work.

Mother became an invalid long before the eldest of us grew up; and on Father devolved the task of taking out his daughters, if we were to be taken out at all.

He arranged every winter numerous small ball parties at Hodnet Rectory for the many balls in the neighbourhood. I was not well enough to go to them, but he took my sisters regularly, also delightful visits to country houses and still more delightful trips to London and Switzerland. I went abroad with him once or twice, but later on refused to do so, as I frequently spoiled the pleasure of every one by sudden and dreadful attacks of asthma. But Father never remembered the fiascos I brought about, and always affectionately pressed me to accompany him next time.

From childhood onwards he took a keen and most uncomfortable interest in our appearance. We could never hope that his all-seeing eye would fail to detect a hole in our stockings, or a button off our gloves: those weary gloves which we had invariably to wear. No slightest form of slovenliness was tolerated. Many things be-

sides slovenliness were not permitted to us as children, or at any age. Anger was considered contemptible. We were made to feel mortally ashamed if we showed temper. He used to say, "Anyone can be angry," a saying which remained in the minds of his children through life.

We never saw violent temper or heard a voice raised in anger in our home. When first we began to visit at other houses and heard the choleric heads of the household shout at their offspring, and exhibit themselves in all the undignified contortions which accompany a loss of temper, we thought the last day was come!

The artistic side of life appealed strongly to Father. He had the instincts of the collector which have proved so fatal to our family. These, with a few small exceptions, he denied himself through life.

He loved flowers and understood them, and worked strenuously in his

garden. Our drawing-room was always full of them. He arranged them with a magic hand. I have never, at any time of year, returned home after prolonged absence without finding fresh flowers in my room arranged by him. He could find flowers when, so far as we could see, there were none.

The beautiful arrangement of pictures, old china, old furniture, the profusion of flowers in our home we took as a matter of course. It had always been so ever since we could remember. Only when we set up houses of our own did some of us realize how unerring his taste had been, how difficult of achievement are harmony and dignity.

Father had taken deep root at Hodnet, where he had spent his childhood and the greater part of his life; and he was tenderly attached to his people. But, at sixty-five, after a serious illness, he decided that it was his duty to resign his living, in spite of the urgent entreaties of his parishioners to remain.

His later years in London were happy and peaceful, and full of interest. He made his London drawing-room at Albert Gate Mansions almost exactly the same as his country one. The same Persian carpet was on the floor. The pictures hung in nearly the same positions. The china and cabinets fell into their accustomed places. Flowers were always there in plenty. Even when his sight had become dim from old age he still remained keenly alive to the ornamental side of life.

I introduced to him my dear friend, Mr. Howard Sturgis. Father, sunk in his armchair, appeared oblivious of everything except a vague politeness.

But that evening, as we were sitting round the fire, he said suddenly with profound conviction, "That Mr. Sturgis is a very handsome man."

On another occasion we were discussing in his presence the question of engaging a certain housemaid whom we thought suitable, if somewhat old. We

agreed that she certainly was extremely plain. We had no idea that Father was listening, when his voice was suddenly heard saying. "A plain woman would be a frightful nuisance in the house."

During these later years all manner of interesting men and women assembled in his drawing-room, actors and actresses, statesmen, ministers, poets, novelists, celebrities of all kinds.

Seated in his armchair, infirm but erect, he extended to his visitors exactly the same benevolent courtesy as to his parishioners; the same polite interest in the new play or the new book as in the vexed question of many years before of Mrs. Brown's cap.

After his death one of those who had known him only in his last years wrote to me that he was one of "the finest gentlemen" it had been his lot to meet.

As we grew into men and women, Father gradually ceased to believe that we could do wrong. He relaxed the

reins of authority, trusted us entirely, and we had no small difficulty in prevailing on him to believe we had been in fault if we wished to confess it, or to ask his advice. Unselfishness had been the habit of a lifetime, and before old age arrived it had become second nature. Old age is often a time when the younger generation which tends it must forgive and ignore much. The faculties become blunted, and a tendency to egotism, hitherto perhaps held in check, slips its fetters. But with Father it was not so. His mind, never very active, lost its grasp, his memory except of bygone days failed him, his clever hands became powerless, the flame of life sank low and lower; but his perfect patience and unselfishness remained.

The last days of his life were passed by him in hourly childlike anticipation of setting forth on a journey. His mind wandered. We were not sure that he knew us. I put some flowers

near him, and he recognized those beloved friends of a lifetime after he had ceased to know his children. The last time he spoke to me was to ask in gentle reproach why, as everything was ready, we did not start. I assured him that he would start very soon.

And a day later, with his hand in Victoria's, he departed in peace.

MOTHER

II

MOTHER

MOTHER[1] and Father met almost for the first time at a dance which Father, a light-hearted bachelor of six-and-twenty, gave at Hodnet Rectory. The neighbouring houses brought parties. Mother was one of the Cloverly party, that house renowned for its hospitality in our youth.

When Mother arrived as a bride of twenty-three at Hodnet Rectory she wore her hair in a manner new to that secluded neighbourhood, which she had learnt in Paris. A cousin of Father's at once informed her that such a coiffure

[1] Mother was the daughter of Colonel Beaumont, and sister of the late H. F. Beaumont, M.P., of Whitley Beaumont.

" was unsuited to a clergyman's wife." It was characteristic of Mother, then in the height of her great good looks, that she at once adopted an old-fashioned mode, and never did her hair in the obnoxious and extremely becoming manner again, which the censorious cousin herself adopted a year later. It is doubtful whether Mother's coiffure was really out of harmony with a Rectory, but it is certain that the life of a country clergyman's wife was absolutely uncongenial to her, and she never succeeded in adapting herself to her surroundings. Political life and a wide social sphere would have been sympathetic to her. Yet she had persistently refused to marry a man (now dead), for whom she had a deep and lifelong regard, who could have given her all these things. He became later on a marked figure in political life and a Cabinet Minister. When we came to London as girls he was most kind to us for Mother's sake.

There is a dim photograph of her, taken some time after her marriage, very handsome, with parted hair and noble brow, and magnificent dark eyes, but sad in expression. She had had an unhappy childhood, and had undergone a severe shock early in life when her only sister and inseparable companion fell from her horse and became a permanent invalid.

Mother's white hands had no dexterity. What a labour it must have been to her to concoct the elaborate paper boats which she was always ready to make for us, which we so ruthlessly destroyed.

Our picture books and story books were chosen with great care. There were very few of them, and they were nearly all German. We were brought up on Flaxmann, and Retzsch and Grimm. And there was also a German book with coloured pictures about a disobedient dog called "Schlupp," who was always in disgrace, always being whipped by

his Prussian owner in blue trousers. I think, in the end, poor Schlupp was hanged, for the edification of the baby Prussians of fifty years ago, and I hope for ours in our little English Rectory.

Mother wrote the plays for Father's toy theatre, and helped him to perform them. She must have had considerable talent, for they were vivid, dramatic, and in a flowing verse which children could understand.

She desired no luxuries, and despised those who regarded them as important. She would have lived without complaint on bread and water, clad in sackcloth. The underclothing which she arranged for us was the same as the very poor wear. She wore the same herself. Our nurse used to weep over the underclothing. I can see her now, holding up a severe white garment of Mother's, the small round tears hopping down her polished apple cheeks, and saying, "It's a cross to me to

make 'em so plain. It's my cross, and I must bear it."

After Mother's death I found some of her trousseau things untouched, fine cobwebs of handkerchiefs, beautifully embroidered.

She brought us up to disdain personal comfort and ease. We thought it almost wicked to lie on a sofa, so scathingly did she speak of such self-indulgence. So deeply did she impress upon us the moral depths to which we sink when we sink down on sofas that even now, after half a lifetime, I feel secretly ashamed if I yield to temptation.

The Spartan element in her succeeded better in the rearing of her strong children than her delicate ones.

The difference of temperament between herself and her children remained an unsolved problem to her, and created, as years went by, almost a gulf between her and them. She found us fanciful, fastidious, incomprehensible. She once told me in later years, and it was a

generous admission of a mistake on her part, that she had considered it absurd that one of us at five years old should refuse to drink out of another child's cup. She forced the child so to drink. It obeyed and was immediately sick.

The great uprightness and austerity of her character were combined with a certain rigidity. She impressed on us an iron sense of duty. I remember her once saying passionately, in sudden tears, "It is the only thing there is." I recognize now how deep a debt her children owe her, how earnestly she tried to teach us to think, how she strove to make us truthful, ready to serve others, and never, never to spare ourselves. That was the great crime. Self-indulgence in any form.

But the artistic side of life did not appeal to her. It repelled her. She lived in the midst of beautiful things, and she craved for whitewashed walls and tables of deal. She did not care

about any of the things which Father and all his children adored. She tacitly disapproved of his love of beauty, and probably regretted that it appealed so irresistibly to her children. No doubt one of the reasons why Father took such a keen interest in his daughters' dress was because Mother had no taste for it.

Even before her health failed, her mind could not grapple with the practical side of life. Her housekeeping was non-existent. She had no power of dealing with servants. At sixteen it became necessary that I should leave the schoolroom and undertake the management of our household of eighteen people. I never received from her any hint as to how to perform that duty. I feel sure she did not withhold knowledge. She had it not. She was not for nothing the granddaughter of Sir George Cayley.[1] Her

[1] Sir George Cayley's experiments in flying machines preceded by nearly a hundred years the general interest in flight. He received in 1908 tardy but full recognition

turn of mind was scientific. She ought to have been a bachelor professor in a whitewashed laboratory, instead of the invalided mother of many children. She read and was deeply interested in books on hydraulics, astronomy, anything that had a law behind it, and was bitterly disappointed that her children refused to be interested in these —to her—entrancing subjects. I can imagine Mother very happy as a Don in a college, secluded from contact with difficult fellow-creatures and household bills. She had not *la peur de vivre*

as a pioneer, when his surviving grandchildren were al over seventy years of age. For many years his flying machine remained in the attics at Brompton Hall, and most of his great-grandchildren have seen it there. But, on recent inquiry, I hear it has disappeared. Mother, with her scientific leanings, would have been deeply interested had she still been alive, in the fact that, in her eldest grandson, her grandfather's love of flying machines revived. Reginald Cholmondeley, Sir George Cayley's great-great-grandson, became an expert airman in the Royal Flying Corps, and was mentioned in dispatches for his excellent aeroplane service in France against the Germans, in February 1915. He fell the following month at Neuve Chapelle.

which a later generation has developed. She was far too courageous for that. But she had a pathetic ignorance of life itself. She wandered in a maze of difficulties. She battled against imaginary foes. She could not reconcile herself to her lot, or understand her fellow-creatures.

She became partially paralysed when Hester, her youngest born, was still a small child, and there is no doubt that her illness was partly responsible for her severe mental depression.

She bore this overwhelming calamity, which increased slowly year by year, with unflinching heroism—I never heard her complain of noise, though the amount of noise we made, aided by our beloved poodle, Lindo, was at times terrific.

The presence of Uncle Reggie in our home was painful to her, but she bore it in silence for years, as Father believed it to be his duty.

Her later life, spent between her sofa

in the drawing-room and her deck chair in the garden, was darkened by a deep depression and an earnest desire for death. She dreaded to become quite helpless; but this additional burden she was not, thank God, called upon to bear. She had never, even in youth, possessed buoyancy of temperament, and in age her spirit became profoundly depressed, though she had to her hand many of the materials out of which happiness can be made. She was somewhat helped by her sense of humour. I have seen her laugh till she cried over parts of Dickens when Father read aloud to us in the evenings. I have seen her smile grimly at her own expense. But these were only momentary gleams across long stretches of gloom, in which her anxious, over-apprehensive mind foresaw every species of misfortune and disgrace marching in serried ranks to overwhelm her family and herself.

She was not able to be with her youngest child in her last illness. We

feared this anguish would turn her brain. But she bore it with her customary fortitude. After Hester's death she wrote me a letter which I have still. (She had long since ceased to be able to write with a pen. Her few letters were slowly and painfully spelt out on a typewriter.) It is a long letter which must have been an immense effort to her to write. In it she says, "Life has taught me many things—but one of the hardest to learn has been one's want of power to help and comfort the children who are so dear." Therein lay the tragedy of dear Mother's life. She would often, how gladly, have helped and comforted us, but neither she nor we could bridge the gulf between us. How often she must have felt lonely, thwarted, misunderstood!

Her own death, so long desired, came with merciful suddenness.

I have in my heart many sad and

poignant memories of Mother, but one remains more vivid than all the rest.

Once, after I had been ill a long time, I had crawled down to the drawing-room where Father and Mother were sitting. Father had asked me how I was, and I had shown want of courage, and burst into tears. Presently Father had gone out. When Mother and I were alone, she got up slowly and with great difficulty from her sofa, and came and stood before me in her pale Indian shawl, her beautiful white hands clasped upon her ebony stick. And, so standing, leaning heavily on her stick, while I shed foolish tears of weakness, she spoke to me with great nobility, enjoining on me that for Father's sake she and I must do our best to conceal our sufferings.

The most craven heart could not have failed to respond to that austere appeal.

"NINNY"

III

"NINNY"

"NINNY," the beloved nurse, became one of our household before the eldest of us can remember her coming. She was in the service of my grandmother before she came to us as quite a young woman. She never left us. She was a farmer's daughter. She had many relatives, some hard-working and simple folk, one of whom came to live with her in her old age. But there were others who thought scorn of her for being a servant. I remember once how Ninny, on one of her rare holidays, went to stay with one of her rich brothers, and how I envied her nephews and nieces because they had ponies to ride, while

we had none. But when she returned she told Mother they had looked down on her, and she would never go to them again. She cast in her lot with us, and became bone of our bone.

She could barely read and write. As a small child I remember mysterious visits from the village schoolmaster, and she made secret efforts to learn handwriting. She certainly succeeded in becoming able to read fairly easily, but, to the end of her life, she could hardly put two sentences together on paper.

My earliest recollection of her was as always washing, or furiously scrubbing something—too often myself. Father made her a little washing-place between the schoolroom and the nursery, and there she used to stand hour by hour in a sort of sustained turmoil, her long, thin, purple arms and talons of hands plunged in a whirlpool of soapsuds.

She was inordinately proud of our

hair and was for ever washing it. Half our childhood, as it seemed to us, was ruefully spent with our heads hanging over the edge of the tall nursery fender, our manes spread out to dry. I used to think the heat would crack the back of my head, but we never mentioned our sufferings. We should have been scolded if we had. Ninny would seize off Mother's white Indian shawl, lather it in foaming soap, and then, in an incredibly short time, hurry back with it, and wrap it round her again, hot from the iron.

She washed everything, even the blankets of the household. How often I have seen her, with a print sunbonnet rakishly cocked on her head, flying out with an armful of blankets, and arranging them to dry in a long line on our garden fence in front of the drawing-room windows. When I was about fourteen, with dawning aspirations towards snobbishness, I secretly disapproved of this exhibition. Our cousins, and neigh-

bours, did not hang *their* blankets on their railings. But I never dared give expression to this disapproval, and Father and Mother were both much too simple to object to the practice, or even to think it peculiar.

Ninny and Mother often came to words, but they loved and respected each other till death.

Father and Mother were unselfish, but Ninny was selfless. She loved all the eight of us with an entire absorption, and spent herself for us. We were all, in her eyes, types of perfect beauty. And, when we were grown up, we could do no wrong. As children she used to whip us severely—at least she did me. Tornadoes of wrath passed over us, for she had a violent temper. It made no difference in our love for her. We never thought about her love for us, her devotion to us, any more than we thought about the air we breathed. She was the source of all comfort, as the outspread wings of the mother bird

are to the nestlings. In all childish griefs we fled to Ninny.

Ninny had thin, regular, severe features, and a short upper lip. She was very good-looking, even in old age, with ruddy, winter-apple cheeks. In early life she had a beautiful, erect, and slender figure, on which clothes sat to perfection. My grandmother used to say of her that she was one of the best-dressed women she knew; and the only photograph we have of her shows her in a full, soft gown and moderate crinoline, and no ornament on the bodice except a small brooch fastening a lace collar. Her dress was far simpler and more distinguished than that of our other female relations and friends as portrayed in Mother's old photograph album—amazing personages in gowns of large patterns, festooned with trimmings and ballooned out over immense crinolines.

When we were grown up Ninny always had prettier cotton gowns than we had,

and more of them, and looked better in them than we did.

Mother died very suddenly when Ninny was an old woman living near us in a cottage of her own. A few hours after the event my sisters saw the village fly ascending the steep drive to the Rectory. From the fly, bathed in tears, descended dear Ninny, clad in deepest mourning and a long crêpe veil. At every crisis in life she was always perfectly dressed.

There must have been love affairs in her youth. There is a legend of her once being engaged to a very superior footman who died. I remember her telling me of an old admirer (a butler, I think), in prosperous circumstances, who insisted on bringing his wife to make her acquaintance, and how Ninny gave them tea in the housekeeper's room, and how the bride said in her husband's presence, "I should never have had Tom, Mrs. Coupland, if you would have looked at him."

Ninny had evidently been gratified by this tactful recognition on the part of Mrs. Tom of her true place in her husband's esteem. And Tom, tranquilly eating his muffin, seems to have felt no embarrassment, possibly realising that a great matrimonial opportunity had been missed by his hostess. Even as a small child I always felt that Tom's wife was truly great, and that if I had been in her place I could never have brought myself to say those noble words. And now, after a lifetime, they still seem magnanimous.

Ninny was in the best sense a lady, well-bred, incapable of a coarse word or a mean or self-seeking action, respectful in manner, and self-respecting, refined, dignified. I have never seen her shy, or abashed or forward in manner. She was given many books, and bought many more. She possessed interesting china, and knew its value. She had visited at Byron's house, and quoted him with some pride. She was

generosity itself. She constantly gave us handsome presents, tortoiseshell combs, lace handkerchiefs, ivory hand-glasses. It was quite in vain that we mentioned yearnings for inexpensive articles. How often I have heard her say, looking defiantly at us, "It *must* cost five pounds." She bought herself a magnificent sealskin coat, which she hardly ever wore, and appeared at the family weddings in a plain gown of the richest dove-coloured silk. She always seemed to have plenty of money. At her death she left over two thousand pounds, which is the more astonishing as she never had high wages during the sixty years she was in service, and only in her last years did she receive a small annual payment in addition to her slender pension from Father. She must have put by nearly all her wages all her life. And yet that seems impossible when we recall her great generosity. Ninny's money remains a mystery to us.

She used to entertain at tea on Sundays in the old nursery the young men who came to stay with us. They always asked to be presented to "Mrs. Coupland" and sent her little presents, and photographs of themselves. She possessed at last so many photographs of young men that she did not always know which was which. They were arranged in a serried frieze round the glass case containing her big picture Bible, and the photographs of guests who were about to arrive showed a tendency to work to the front. We used to deceive her shamefully as to the identity of the coming guests, so that the wrong photographs were often found occupying a prominent position at the last moment. Later in life I imitated Ninny in putting forward the book or the magazine of expected literary guests where the author's eye might easily fall upon it.

Ninny received her visitors with great dignity, seated at her large round table

with an array of cups before her. We, of course, accompanied them. She had almost invariably known their parents or relations.

"We met your father, sir, thirty years ago, when we were visiting at the Willoughbys'; a very fine upstanding gentleman."

During all the years she was with us I do not remember her ever being ill, except with that recognized ailment from which all nurses suffer when children implore them to do something for which they have not time. Then occasionally she had "a bone in her leg."

She worked indefatigably, rising with the light, or indeed long before it in winter. How often when I have been sitting up all night with asthma I have heard her swift, heavy tread moving about the house in the dark, and the sound has brought the first gleam of comfort to my distress. How often she has run in with a flaring tallow candle and a cup of scalding black coffee!

Ninny could work herself to death, but she could not make others work; and when the youngest of us was too old for a nurse, and she became the housekeeper our household ship laboured heavily in stormy seas, and was smitten by many Euroclydons. I was at the helm and my anxieties were not few. Ninny had a terrific temper, and reasonableness was not in her. But we bore the situation, and I think it weighed heavily on all of us, except the brothers who were much from home. When she became really too old Father pensioned her, and she moved to a cottage in the village, with a patient, middle-aged niece to take care of her. We visited her nearly every day. No one else in the village had a cottage full of such beautiful things. She was happy there.

The moment when Father gave up the living of Hodnet and we left Shropshire was complicated by anxiety for Ninny. What would she do if we all

left? She was by this time firmly rooted, as we believed, into her pretty cottage. But my brother Reginald offered her the lodge at the gate of his house in Hertfordshire, and the gallant old woman, now very infirm, gave up her home without a moment's hesitation and followed him there. A special van transported all her household goods to a new and well-ordered dwelling. And at Tolmers she lived in great happiness, tenderly cared for by my brother and his wife; worshipping their children—I had almost said her grandchildren—till the day came when she suddenly and painlessly died. Her exact age we have never known.

Whenever I think of boundless love Ninny's fine old face and thin work-worn hands rise before me. How those hands toiled for us—all her life, till they could toil no more! Is there any love like the love of the nurse? It is far greater than mother's love, for it gives itself to the last drop of its blood

for children not its own. Not its own! Foolish, untrue word. We were and are Ninny's children, held in her comfortable arms from our first hour of life, cherished during all our childhood by her passionate devotion. As one grows old one realizes with awe that if that indeed is love, one has never loved. To whom among those we think we have loved have we given in the same measure as Ninny gave to us, lavished not on one of us, but without stint equally on all eight of us.

How wonderful, how blessed for us to have seen a perfect love made flesh dwelling in our own home, in our own nursery! We, Ninny's children, know by experience what St. Paul preaches in his burning words to the Corinthians. For Ninny's love indeed suffered long and was kind, did not seek its own, thought no evil, bore all things, believed all things, hoped all things, endured all things,—*never failed.*

HESTER

IV

HESTER

HESTER was the youngest child of a family of eight.

There were no events in her life, no love affair, no adventure, no arresting or peculiar experience; and she died at twenty-two.

She spent her short existence in a remote country place, its later years overshadowed by weak health.

How then can I write a chronicle when there is almost nothing to record?

But Hester left behind, besides a vast mass of other papers, a voluminous diary which amounts to an autobiography: a detailed, persistent account not only of her own life, but of every event,

great or small, which befell her brothers and sisters.

It was comparatively easy to draw the little pencil sketches of Father and Mother and Ninny. I had nothing to go by but my own memory.

But with Hester it is more difficult. My memory is at every point confronted by her diary, with the result that I see too much. The clear outline of her in my mind becomes blurred by the myriad details she has given me of herself.

The pencil wavers in my hand. I lay it down bewildered. But I must even take it up again and do the best I can. For there is no one else to make the attempt if I relinquish it.

An old friend writes:

"My first remembrance of Hessie is a cheery, pleasant little girl, with very beautiful bright grey eyes, and an amusing objection to being left in the background."

Hester, as the youngest, found it very

nccessary to assert herself, and she did so with energy in season and, occasionally, out of season. She was not to be repressed. She was warm-hearted, full of enthusiasms and hero-worship, fiery tempered: a little *furibond* if her family and the world in general displeased her, as both often did.

At a very tender age she put pen to paper. The earliest document I have unearthed from her masses of manuscript is a small book with this explanatory frontispiece:

HESTER CHOLMONDELEY

MY TRAVELS ON
THE
CONTINENT OF
EUROPE
AT THE AGE OF $11\frac{3}{4}$ TO 12

Detailed accounts follow of Paris and Cannes, where we spent the winter.

Conscientious descriptions bristling with historical allusions are given of the return journey by Avignon, Dijon, and Fontainebleau.

Another little book is entitled:

H. CHOLMONDELEY'S POETRY
COMPOSED BY HER

A contents list greets the eye on the first page. "Now that my love is dead," page 2 (aged 13), etc., etc. In this book of poetry is embedded a thrilling prose romance, composed at the age of twelve. It is appropriately called *War to the Knife*, for it is full of knives.

I give a few grisly sentences culled from a scene on a battlefield:

"Now, Morley," he cried, "my time has come. What did you mean by taking her from me?"

"Who do you mean?" murmured the wounded man faintly. . . .

"Who do I mean?" cried he fiercely, and, bending lower over his fallen Colonel, he said: "She would have been happy with me. She was never happy with you."

"But, have mercy; she's been dead so long."

"My vengeance is the same," said McLane. Tis eyes glared and he drew his sword. The steel flashed and descended and the fearful deed was done. Colonel Morley was dead." . . .

McLane is always at his murdering. No one is safe. A few pages later the reader, now inured to fulsome deeds of double-dyed treachery, reads that—

"McLane . . . drew out his big hunting knife,"—and this time killed the hero. "He's dead," he muttered. "I must fly," and he turned and fled.

I need hardly say, however, that the hero was not allowed to expire in this hurried manner. Only after a suitable farewell scene with his lady love "he

sank back in her arms . . . his time was up and he was gone."

Hester's love of flowers and her vehement religious emotions begin to assert themselves, rubbing shoulders with her first attempt at fiction, in the yellow pages of this little book. There are poems on foxgloves and daisies, and The Recording Angel, and life and death. There is a foregleam also of the sarcasm noticeable in her later writings in a set of verses on "The Inhabitants of Hodnet Rectory," in which Father and Mother are the only members who are treated with any respect.

As small children I used to tell Victoria and Hester many stories, which possibly fired Hester to literary composition.

When I "came out" and "went visits" there was a tacit understanding between us—how it began I don't know—that I *must* recount an adventure on my return home. As I began to pay

more visits I became somewhat hard pressed for new and suitable adventures. Sometimes also I was bored, and inclined to shirk. But Victoria and Hester were inexorable. Glued one on each side of me, holding my coat for fear of displacement, they made me "walk and deliver" the morning after my return. Victoria was a tranquil listener, but Hester used to turn as red as flame and shed tears of rage if I said "anything silly," by which she meant anything which in her estimation could not really have happened.

Her judgment was final, and of lightning swiftness, and she did not hesitate to pronounce it.

I was allowed a certain latitude. I might be—I often was—kidnapped by brigands during a visit to relations in Yorkshire. I came across lions in shrubberies; *escaped* lions of course, from menageries, not growing wild. But it was *de rigueur* that the adventures should be probable.

I have never forgotten how once, in a frivolous mood, not having got anything ready in the train coming home, I recounted in an off-hand manner, inventing as I went along, how I had happened to be buried alive while out sketching in a churchyard, the coffin fortunately for me having been deposited in a vault. I had not thought out my disentanglement from a situation of undeniable gravity, and with total lack of literary conscience I shamelessly affirmed that *I had prised open the coffin lid with a sheet of drawing paper.* At this point Hester, who had been hanging on my words with bated breath, and who had accepted with respect the statement of my decision to take a nap in an empty coffin put ready for future use in the church porch—at this point she at once assaulted me, pommelling me with her fists, shedding tears of sheer fury. Large tears rolled in silence down Victoria's cheeks. I had wounded to the quick my two

faithful little friends. I apologized, I begged to be forgiven. I, with my hair done up, ate "humble pie" to those two pigtails.

When the tears subsided I offered to go back into my coffin. I did go back into it. I don't remember how I finally emerged from it, but I think Hester, still agitated but judicial, allowed me to have thieves coming creeping in with lanterns to break open the coffin and rob the dead, and that I got up wrapped in my shroud, to their great alarm, and stalked out. I know it all came right in the end.

When she was thirteen she won a prize in *Little Folks*. At fourteen she wrote an account of the restoration of Hodnet Church, in which she mentions that a skull was dug up with a nail in it.[1] The following year she started a second book of poetry. Genius seems

[1] This obvious murder made a great sensation among the people of Hodnet. The local policeman asked the Squire whether he ought "to take any steps about it."

to have burned up bravely, for long poems are inscribed, mainly of a sentimental or religious character. But she remained faithful to her love of the horrible in a poem entitled "Ghosts," in which she describes how ghosts emerge through the looking-glass—

> While you 'neath bedclothes sleep.
>
> The dressing gown is hurried on
> That you so lately wore,
> And filmy legs with hurried steps
> Trot o'er your bedroom floor.

During these years she wrote summaries of all Father's sermons and nearly always those of the curates as well. It was to be expected that Father's sermons were almost invariably pronounced to be excellent. The curates seldom received higher commendation than "Mr.—— preached the sermon; good for *him*."

Hester revelled in small volumes. She had another in which during those two years she inscribed her opinion of

the books she read. She had already the courage of her opinions, but her somewhat trenchant judgments are often sound. I give a few extracts:

MISS C. YONGE

The Heir of Redcliffe: Sentimental and feeble; goes on too long after Guy's death.

The Daisy Chain: Too long and too dull. Some characters good and life-like, but others solemnly exaggerated and unnatural. Dr. May charming and Flora well drawn.

The Little Duke: A capital story, truly and well written.

The Lances of Lynwood, The Prince and the Page, and *Countess Kate*: All fairly good children's stories; the latter the best and delightfully written.

The Dove in the Eagle's Nest: A good historical story.

Heartsease: Good but excessively annoying. Theodora is unnatural and irritating to the last degree. Violet tiresomely good, John unnaturally sentimental, and always ill and coughing; Percy rather nice; Lord St. Erme really rather nice; the children wretchedly unlifelike. Arthur the best character, so thoughtless and yet kind; his conversion at the end a mistake. All Miss Yonge's books very young-lady-like, too good, too dull, and too high church. All so exclusively written for schoolroom girls. I hate them.

Lawless, Miss Emily

Major Lawrence: Too long and detailed and dull. Very little incident, no point and no ending.

Hurrish: By same author. A delightful story. Irish life charmingly described, the characters good and the story interesting. Hurrish is a bold, fine character whom one loves and admires. Clever description of a violent thunderstorm.

Lamartine

Graziella: A perfectly charming French story of an Italian peasant girl. It is a lovely picture of Italy, and is written in beautiful French.

Sand, George

La Petite Fadette: A pretty, gracefully told story in G. Sand's charming flowing French.

Thomas Carlyle

Lectures on Heroes: A splendid set of essays, deēply interesting, requiring careful reading and thought. The four first are the best to my mind. When we come to look upon Burns, Johnson, or Napoleon as heroes it becomes more difficult. Carlyle's rugged style is very impressive and suited to his earnest straightforward thought, but still he is often very irritating in his repetitions, his inversions of sentences, his evasions of certain disagreeable sides in the characters of his heroes.

DANTE

Divina Commedia: The greatest and noblest work ever written. An inspiration, a revelation! The Inferno most interesting. The Purgatorio most peaceful and quiet. The Paradiso one blaze of light. Wright's translation capital.

From all these literary activities, sandwiched between lengthening hours in the schoolroom, poor Hester was rudely awakened by the shock of her sister Essex's engagement to Ralph Benson. Hester worshipped Essex. This awful event came upon her as a thunderclap. She was quite unprepared for it, and felt acutely that she had never guessed anything was wrong.

It is somewhat surprising that a person who, for several years past, had been writing voluminously in prose and verse upon the tender passion should never have realized that lovers did not always die as in her

pages; that occasionally they married instead.

She had also such a deep-rooted admiration for the law-making sex that, even now, I wonder why she regarded Ralph with such condign disfavour. She had mentioned him in her diary of the previous year with marked approval, and the evening before he committed the heinous act of proposing she, who records everything, notes that she made him a button-hole. He was twenty-four. He was very nice looking. She had seen him magnificent in a gilt yeomanry helmet upon a coal-black charger. He danced beautifully—*in a pink coat!* He shot well, rode well, and cared with real discrimination for poetry and literature. What more could she desire! She says somewhere that it was not what he *was*, but what he had *done*, that she could not forgive. She thawed towards him gradually, which was not surprising, for he was most kind to her. He wrote her charm-

ing literary letters such as her soul loved, and she was much at his beautiful place Lutwyche after the marriage.

When the fearful event was over she became much more alert to foresee possible engagements. She was not going to be surprised a second time. I find in her diary:

"Miss C.—— came in the evening. She is engaged to a Mr. D——. She did not tell us outright, but I guessed it almost immediately."

Hester now began a regular diary which she continued till within seven weeks of her death. This diary of many volumes contains about 222,000 words. It will be remembered that the average six-shilling novel contains as a rule, 80,000 or 90,000 words.

In this year, when she was sixteen, her mental activity makes a sudden stride. An amazing energy, a zealous application, and a sort of fiery pertinacity

are among the most salient of her characteristics from this time onwards till her death.

Her diary was only one of the multitudinous channels into which the bubbling spring of her energies overflowed.

She laid aside her little notebook on *Books I have read,* and substituted for it a large volume entitled *Opinions.* It contains a hundred and fifty-three long and careful criticisms of books.

She kept bees, and wrote a detailed account of each of the various hives under the title *Bee Affairs.*

My principal recollection of "the little people who are always angry" was that they would insist on swarming on a Sunday, directly the church bells began to ring. You might beat upon a tray as much as you liked on a Saturday, which was a half-holiday, and they paid no attention, but on a fine Sunday morning I used to see poor Victoria and Hester standing with despair in

their faces, in their Sunday hats, watching, prayer-book in hand, these wretched bees furiously preparing to swarm while they were in church.

She was confirmed this year, and devoted a volume entirely to transcribing Father's teaching at her confirmation classes with scrupulous, unflagging exactitude. In another volume she wrote a detailed account of Father's lenten lectures, and in yet another book of the same date she made copious extracts from the Bible and devotional books "to help her through the day." Many pages in her diary show how seriously she took her confirmation.

The output of poetry increases year by year. A bulky volume entitled *Quotations from Everywhere* is undated, but appears to have been begun about this time. It contains a considerable collection of quotations.

She also made a gallant attempt to compile an alphabetical list of what

she called *Names of the Nineteenth Century*, giving a few lines of biography to each name.

Under the letter A short notices are given of John Adolphus, Harrison Ainsworth, Dr. Thomas Arnold, Sir Archibald Allison, Matthew Arnold, Professor E. Arber, Jane Austen, W. E. Aytoun, and Edwin Arnold; but, after writing up nineteen authors, beginning with B, this enormous project appears to have been abandoned.

During this time stories and essays as well as poems were continually flowing from her pen. And she contributed regularly to *The Sunflower*, a children's magazine.

She was already becoming a drastic critic of the work of others, stating her opinions with a frankness which never regarded possible consequences.

She writes in her diary:

"Maymie [1] heard from ——, who sent

[1] I was called Maymie in my youth.

her a book written by A., B. and himself. My high opinion and respect for ——'s cleverness is gone. How three grown men could publish that book, one far over thirty, thinking it humorous, or interesting, or lifelike, beats me. Oh ——, may you never do such a folly again! I am sorry for you."

Hester had a boundless admiration for two of the three authors of this little book. Nevertheless she could utterly condemn the maiden effort of her two demi-gods. I fared but little better, in spite of handsome allusions on some of her pages to my great abilities.

"Maymie read us two chapters of her story.[1] Mrs. Alwin is capital, but the tenants' supper is poor, and should certainly come out. I think it will, for we have made her see it is weak and uninteresting."

[1] *Sir Charles Danvers.*

The tenants' supper had taken a long time to write, but it came out.

I cannot resist giving the greater part of one of the few letters of which she had kept a copy. It was written when she was sixteen to the young Editress of *The Sunflower*.

"DEAR MISS DORLING,

"It struck me that it is a long time since I have sent you anything for the *Sunflower*. Having a cold and a week's holiday one on the top of the other, I sat down to write you something, and produced the well-covered sheets you will receive this morning. I sat down intending to write something entirely different from what I did, and now I feel very doubtful if you will approve of it. I hope I have not said anything that may annoy either you or any of your subscribers, and please do not feel hurt, for I know you do your best, but you cannot surely help seeing how very poor the stories and everything else in the *Sunflower* are, if you are the least fond of writing yourself. Please

read through my paper carefully, burn it if it annoys you, and put it in your paper if you approve of my idea. I feel almost sure you wish to improve your magazine, and make it better than the common little run of them. . . . I don't want a moral magazine, and don't, for Heaven's sake, introduce anything sacred or really serious, but make it a more sensible thing. Don't take everything sent you, put in now and then a short, clever story, the very best you can get. I suppose I must also advise what to put in the place of what is taken away. A paper on some particularly new interesting book any one may have read—short amusing stories one comes across of great men's lives, young or old, living or dead. Papers on animals and pets, on any subject whatever either interesting or amusing—papers on anything they happen to know more about from their natural position than others, *but*, and a great "but" I think it to be, *not* instructive. Don't feel bound to follow out my plan, for I shall be horrified if you do and it fails, but *think about it.*

. . . Get your subscribers to agree; do nothing against their will, or you may fall upon me unmercifully if they fall off and desert you. I hope and trust you won't think me rude or impertinent. I don't mean to be. You are too good-natured to think me anything but yours sincerely,

"HESTER CHOLMONDELEY."

This severe letter did not apparently cast a gloom over the spirits of the Editress of *The Sunflower*, for the next issue contained an essay on "Writing" from Hester's pen, too long to quote here, but calculated to stimulate, if it did not entirely paralyse, the energies of her fellow-contributors.

She was a severe critic of life as well as of literature. With dreadful candour she notes in her diary:

"N—— was tried at luncheon by Mary's Emersonian views of friendship."

She was as unsparing to herself as to

others. A little later on I find her saying:

"I read over my old novel, that I never finished, this afternoon, and feel quite disgusted with it; it is so weak, so morbid. Mary's story written at seventeen, *Her Evil Genius*, which I have just read, is much better, but horribly vulgar."

At seventeen she made a careful summary of English history from 1042 till 1718. She joined the Correspondence Classes of Queen Margaret's College, Glasgow, and wrote for them an enormous number of essays. She had several certificates for their examinations which she passed. The output of stories and poems did not cease, in spite of the encroaching delights of social life. Hester was enthusiastically sociable, as indeed most of us were. We all loved our fellow-creatures, if they were interesting or gay, or good-looking—a somewhat large "if."

She had already been to one or two dances which she of course chronicled, with a few pithy sentences about each of her partners.

"Mr. —— asked me for the first. He dances capitally. . . . He is quiet and grave, and though very red-faced and small is rather handsome. . . . I liked him very much."

She liked many young men very much. Several years before this date her diary shows two great devotions running in double harness, and apparently always keeping step with each other; one for a boy a year or two older than herself, and the other for a middle-aged man of whom she knew almost nothing.

She, who kept everything, had, of course, kept her ball programmes. The serried lines of names, with almost never a gap, showed how popular she was as a partner. She could not bear standing out a dance. But if this

catastrophe happened, it was never glossed over in the diary. It was always mentioned. It does not seem to have happened often.

She was certainly very pretty, but not in a striking manner. It was easy to overlook her. She was small, plump, with a very light and slender figure. And she had a pretty hand and foot, delicate irregular features, short upper lip, the chin a little too small, and masses of fine light-brown hair. Her dark grey-green eyes were rather too large for her small face, with very clearly defined level eyebrows, and long, curled eyelashes — amazing eyelashes. She had a complexion like a dog rose, but it varied with her moods, and had a tendency to flush on important occasions such as balls or hockey matches.

She wore her hair raised from the forehead at a time when the eyes of her contemporaries all peered out from

under a thatch of "fringe." Perhaps it was the way she did her hair that lent her a little air of distinction, which I find it difficult to describe. She gave to all who knew her the impression —and it was a true one—of great refinement.

Unlike her large and angular brothers and sisters, she had an extreme neatness and "finish" about her whole appearance, as if she had been cut out with a very sharp pair of scissors. She had a habit of walking with very small, quick *affairé* steps, slightly tilted forward, which always reminded me of the gait of a water wagtail.

Until I opened Hester's diary, I had an impression that we lived very quietly at Hodnet, except during the winter when the hunting and shooting began, and when there were numbers of balls.

But Hester dispelled that illusion. She has made a note, seldom without

comment caustic or kindly, of every person who passed through the house. It hardly ever seems to have been empty. The large numbers of people who stayed with us, the quantities of visits we paid ourselves, astonishes me as I read her *Book of the Chronicles*.

Tom had, by this time, become a land agent. Regie was in the army. Dick had migrated to Australia. Essex was married. It was years since we had all eight been at home together. But Dick's return to England for a time made it possible. An effort was set on foot, and we all eight assembled under one roof once more. Hester records with glee how much noise we made at dinner, drinking the family's health, and how handsome we all were, which shows that even her critical eye could occasionally take a roseate view, not strictly in accordance with obvious facts.

I remember that evening well. We were thirteen, because we had three

guests staying with us. Our cousin, Mary Beaumont, afterwards Mrs. Maturin, our friend Willy Lilburn, and Miss Paulina Irby, my godmother, the only woman, so far as I know, who has ever been knighted (for her good services to the Servians). She wore her order that night, and beamed benevolently upon us all. I am afraid there is no doubt we *were* noisy. Father and Mother smiled tolerantly at us from either end of the table. It was the last time we were all together.

The following year seems to have been the happiest of Hester's short life. In it Essex Benson's first child, George, was born, whom Hester adored. In this year also Regie married, his wife at once becoming our beloved and steadfast friend.

On the last day of the year she writes how happy and bright the year has been, and what good things it has brought, but she adds that she is not so well and strong as she was, that

she is never quite free from asthma and a cough.

"I had a distinct warning of more in my last cold, when I was attacked with acute pain in my left side, and could hardly breathe for it . . . is it coming on slowly and surely that thing I sometimes think of? . . . all seems very good as it is, and changes are cruel things. . . . Time . . . do your best for us."

I see now—we are all wise after the event—that Hester's health was beginning to fail in the previous winter. We did not suspect it, for she was going out a great deal, enjoying her balls and visits immensely, delighted with all the new places she was seeing, the new people she was meeting. The reason why we did not take alarm when she was unwell was because we supposed it was in her case as in mine "only asthma."

I had suffered severely from asthma from a child, and had always struggled

up again after a fortnight's purgatory, not intrinsically the worse. Alas! it did not strike us that she *might* be the worse.

Hence we did not take alarm as quickly as we ought to have done when she developed a greater tendency to asthmatic colds and a cough. When we were young, asthma was considered incurable, and we supposed there was nothing for it but to bear it. We never suspected that she might be suffering from anything except asthma.

We were lamentably slow to take alarm, but as Hester remained weakly, a London specialist was at last consulted, and to our consternation, and certainly to my self-upbraiding, it was discovered that one lung was slightly affected.

Hester's diary in January of this year is full of accounts of balls and hockey matches, to which she brought her customary fervid power of enjoy-

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ment. The cloud on her horizon was no bigger than a man's hand.

She gives early in the year a detailed account of one of our country visits. She was not present, but that never interfered with her chronicle of our doings. It seemed I poured forth graphic details in the schoolroom. She says:

"Any one would have thought us mad if they had seen us . . . all tearing up and down the room, each on our little separate beats, as hard as we could."

We four sisters all suffered intensely from cold, and we often raced up and down the old schoolroom to get warm. Each had, as Hester says, her separate beat, to which she had to adhere most rigorously, for fear of collision with the others. While we were all four walking swiftly, our hands in our muffs, we had long discussions on books and people and Life, with a big L. Later on when I read Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of*

the Brontës, I realized with surprise that other eager young women had walked up and down their old schoolroom, just as we had done, before we were born.

"We girls have been talking seriously (no doubt walking as usual, hands in muff) amongst ourselves of our family failing, our apathy and dullness, nay melancholy, and we are going to try and improve this spring. . . . We are heavy and serious. . . . We can't help feeling serious, but we must try to look cheerfuller. C—— [who *can* C. have been?] says we are narrow, or rather we have been cramped, and never allowed fair play . . . but we have tried to develop of ourselves. . . . I always hoped we had not been narrow, but I fear we are . . . tho' I think we think and feel truly, yet a groove of thought is a bad thing to get into, and we are in a groove."

I find no traces of our having emerged from our narrow groove in the spring,

but just when the diary was becoming more interesting two volumes are missing.

The extract given above was from Vol. VII, and Volumes VIII and IX are not to be found.

It seems probable that just as she destroyed (or rather directed me to destroy) her diary for the months following Essex's marriage because she realized it to be morbid, so for the same reason she destroyed her diary at the crisis of her life when she found herself slipping into chronic illness.

In the summer the diary starts again with, alas! constant references to weakness and ill-health, and how hard it is to be left behind.

"It seems as if all the things come to those who have them."

In November of this year Mother and Hester went to Torquay for the winter. This seemed the best arrangement we

could make under the circumstances, but it was not a good one, or at least not the best possible for Hester, as Mother was seriously and chronically ill.

It was obvious, as the long, cold Shropshire winter must be avoided for both of them, that they should go to a sunny climate together. But, like many obvious plans, this one was a mistake. Hester's diary becomes more and more depressed.

"*Nov.* 8.—Why should I get better here in this warm place if I only got worse all through the summer. If it is to come, I only pray God it may come quickly.

Dec. 30.—I walked a little in the sun on the Warburries. I am very low in spirits just now, and little things irritate me so; everything made me worse this afternoon, and the brilliant sun, the warmth, and the clearness of the sky seemed to mock me. Even the brilliant green moss had something

painful in it. Those words kept coming to me.

Does the sun grieve thee ?"

Early in January Hester made the acquaintance of two people to whom she became much attached, Miss Roberts, the well-known author of *L'Atelier du Lys*, and Miss Nesta Higginson (now Mrs. Skrine), a young girl only slightly older than herself, who a few years later became well known by her exquisite *Songs of the Glens of Antrim*, published under the *nom de guerre* of Moira O'Neill.

Every scrap of a note or letter or postcard written by either of these new friends she hoarded. I found them all in her little cedar box after her death.

It is impossible to turn over the pages of Hester's diary at Torquay without being touched anew by the great kindness she received from the residents. When I came to Torquay the following winter I found Hester

established with a charming social circle, to which she introduced me. It is impossible to mention by name all those who showed her constant kindness, but where all were kind, Mrs. Newnham of Wellswood House was kindest. Hester formed a romantic admiration for that most charming and benevolent lady.

Hester seems to have read aloud enormously to Mother during this winter; a very bad thing as her chest was weak, but probably neither thought it could harm her, and Mother had suffered much with her eyes during these months, which she bore with her usual courage. The reading aloud was probably a link between the Mother and daughter to which both clung, as they enjoyed many of the same books.

She reproaches herself bitterly for her selfishness and idleness, and not making progress with her Latin. But to read her diary one is struck with

the amount she did get through, considering her illness. And from the books she read she made copious extracts. And she also wrote many criticisms of books.

"*March* 1.—I do nothing that's good, no work, no nothing. . . . I must try to get out of this slough, and work at something, and try to think less of myself, and try to get back a little discipline. My heart seems to grow old during these long weary days, and my patience to grow so thin it wears into holes."

At the end of May she and Mother returned home. She says: "the delight of getting home was almost too much."

But, happy as she was, her health made no improvement during this summer, although the London specialist had assured us she was better. She was able to do almost nothing. We had begun to have grave fears for her.

We had realized that we had not done

well in sending Mother and Hester to Torquay together, and as, in the meanwhile, my health had shown signs of collapse, it was arranged in the autumn that Hester and I should go together to Torquay for the winter. She was delighted. But, poor child, she was born under an unlucky star. As soon as I arrived at Torquay I immediately fell dangerously ill. This was the best thing possible for me, an entire breakdown was the only exit from my condition, but it was the worst thing possible for her. Fortunately the illness was sharp and short, and mercifully she did not realize the danger till it was past. But it is painful to think of her, so fragile herself, pierced to the heart by witnessing my sufferings. Mrs. Newnham and others devoted themselves to Hester at this crisis. They had cause to be anxious about her. It was a cruel ordeal for one so warm-hearted and sensitive as Hester, and who had so little strength.

In her diary of those dark days she may write that she put her head down on the table and cried, but in the few minutes which she was allowed to spend in my room she was always perfectly calm and undemonstrative. She must have exercised great self-control, for a more impulsive person did not exist.

Better days were in store for both of us. I made a rapid recovery; and was soon in stronger health than I had been for years. Hester recovered her spirits as I became convalescent, and all through that long and severe winter her health never flagged once. We were very happy together, we understood each other. Each was interested in the other's mind.

I insert here, instead of among her other verses, a little poem written at the end of this year which shows how much more peaceful she had become.

CHRISTMAS DAY

I

The sudden sun has trampled on the sea
A throbbing molten path, a wedge of gold
That leads out, seeming limitless to me,
Into the fogs that mingle sea and sky,
Into the regions where thought cannot die.

II

Whence comes its glory firing to my heart?
Why does the ship, upon the edge of light,
One living, quivering hope within me start?
They are but ship and sun, and fog and sky,
And yet to-day, they are what cannot die.

III

Whence comes the glory? is it that one stands
Beside me, pouring gladness on the day
For me from her dear eyes? she understands,
And as we watch the light with reverent eye
Both our hearts know its gleam can never die.

IV

Is then the glory thence?—or glad and free
Is it a life within looks from my eyes?
Is it not Christ, born this day unto me,
The new Christ in my heart, thoughts pure and high,
That like the Christ who lived can never die?

One of our many conversations was on the betrayal of our Lord, or rather

of ourselves. Afterwards Hester brought me the little verse which two years later I put as a heading to a chapter in *Diana Tempest*, with her initials. These lines have been frequently quoted in religious works.

> Still, as of old,
> Man by himself is priced.
> For thirty pieces Judas sold
> Himself, not Christ.

Early in the new year, when I became well enough to be restive at my idleness, I was allowed by my humane doctor to try to write for a short time daily. This meant a great mental exertion for which I hardly had the strength, but I stuck to it for many weeks, and in two months produced two chapters! Hester had heard the earlier part of *Diana Tempest*, knew it all as exactly as I did, and was deeply excited when a further instalment of the great work was poured into her sympathetic ears. I read it to her, somewhat excited myself.

She listened intently. She asked no question; she said no word. When it was finished there was a horrible silence, and she suddenly burst into tears.

At last she said between her sobs: "But she wouldn't have done it. She would never have let him go believing a falsehood. She would have told him the truth. At least a woman like Diana would."

I was amazed and deeply distressed. But if I was distressed Hester was doubly so. Her anguish I shall not forget.

"Don't you think it good?" I ventured.

"Yes, the best you have ever written, but it won't do, because she would have told him."

We were both miserable. We had a silent meal together, both red-eyed. Hester suffered far the most, for she knew what a labour those two chapters had been.

I thought the matter over, came to the conclusion that she was right, destroyed the work of two months, and made a fresh start on a sounder basis.

I did not think of it at the time: it was only in later years that I compared the two occasions, so similar, so dissimilar, when a story of mine had evoked passionate grief in Hester.

The first time I have already described, when as a small child she wrathfully felt I had departed from what was probable in recounting an imaginary adventure, and went for me with clenched fists.

The second and last time is equally vivid in my memory, when her educated and trained mind once again felt that I had failed in the psychology of my novel.

What floods of passionate tears on both occasions! But the second time her tears were absolutely unselfish, because I had built up good work on an unstable foundation.

Early in January when I was on my feet again our life appears from Hester's minute record to have become extremely social. I remember my astonishment when we received twenty-four invitations to luncheon in a fortnight. London was nothing to it. We went to some of these parties, but we soon found that if we attempted to keep pace with the social life of Torquay we should have no time left for work. We ourselves gave little parties and entertainments with absurd scraps of acting and recitation. After we had given an entertainment for thirty sick shop girls, a mild parental rebuke reached us suggesting that it would be prudent to be somewhat less energetic, as we were neither of us robust.

These little entertainments depended on the use of the back drawing-room in our lodgings, which, like all back drawing-rooms, was connected with the front drawing-room by folding doors. The room was not ours, but our land-

lady allowed us to use it as it was unlet.

Just before one of these entertainments we found the landlady had suddenly let this indispensable apartment to a man as his bedroom. We were in despair, but she promised to change his room when the day came, and we, with our customary credulity, went on with our preparations.

When the day arrived, needless to say the offending man was not turned out. The landlady had broken faith with us. We were at our wits' end. However, he did, early in the afternoon, go out for a walk. We hoped it would be a long one. We rushed into his bedroom and changed it into a green-room. I can see now his large evening pumps and other shoes in a line against the wall.

I had a qualm lest he should come home suddenly and find us in acting costume in possession of his room, with the double doors open, and part of it

turned into a small stage with a background of screens. It would really have been extremely awkward if he had come back. But "life is full of risks," as the clergyman said who threw the empty basket out of the train window. *We risked it.* And the dreadful creature never returned till all was safely and successfully over. Afterwards we heard him moving about, perhaps wondering why his things were not quite as he left them.

One of the most interesting features of this winter was the friendship we made with some of the London shop girls at Miss Skinner's Home of Rest near Torquay. And it was for them we gave our most successful entertainments. When we made their acquaintance we found they *all* had a rooted conviction that "ladies" were cruel, inhuman people. We saw much of them and learned to know them well, and we tried to soften their harsh

judgment of us as a class. For the remainder of her short life Hester corresponded with a charming delicate young girl of her own age, employed in Barker's underground department. When Hester died I laid two wreaths upon her coffin made for her by London shop girls.

"You knew her, then," I said to the two girls who had walked several miles in inclement weather to bring their little offerings. "No," they said, "but we had heard of her."

Early in May we went home to Hodnet after a happy and successful winter in which Hester's health had improved wonderfully. The weather was ideal, a poet's May. But the stars in their courses fought against Hester.

A few days later, on May 16, contrary to all precedent a heavy snow fell. It fell incessantly. It crushed all the young leaves. It weighed down the outspread apple blossom outside the schoolroom window. In spite of

the utmost care it affected Hester, who lay in bed watching the flakes drift past her window.

In a few days the pain left her, but she was doomed to every mishap that could befall. Early in June influenza began to rage in our quiet village and she caught it. She was never really well again.

She went through the summer, exhausted by the least exertion, and in the autumn returned for the third time to Torquay, this time with her sister Diana.

That winter the whole of England was flooded by an epidemic of influenza. Torquay, that refuge of invalids, was not likely to escape. Numbers of the inhabitants were attacked. Hester of course caught it, and congestion of the lungs supervened.

Presently we were told that she would not recover, and Father and I went down to her. We found she knew that she was dying.

Then ensued long, terrible weeks, which are like a lifetime to look back on, in which she tried to die and could not.

Diana, with our own servant, and a trained nurse, nursed her with devotion. But only those who have experienced great weakness have any conception of the cross on which Hester's fragile body was stretched, week after week: week after endless week.

Death became the one goal, the one hope. She virtually died several times, and we performed our cruel duty of bringing her back to suffer a little longer.

"I had hoped I should never see the light again," she would say as she regained consciousness and opened her eyes once more on the quiet room which had become a torture chamber to her. She, who was by nature impatient, became patient. If, for a moment, she showed impatience, it was only for a moment. In the long-drawn hours, the endless days and nights of

travail she possessed her soul. Once she said to me in sudden tears, "I am afraid my patience will not last out."

But it did.

Gradually as she became weaker her mind wandered, and she had hallucinations. But through all the tangled meshes of delirium the purity of her spirit shone.

Sometimes when her mind was clear she and I used to talk a little. And I told her I would make a book of her best stories and essays for private circulation. That gave her pleasure. And I told her that I should dedicate my next book to her, on which she had seen me at work so long—*Diana Tempest*. That also gave her pleasure.

She told me she had left all her papers and diaries to me; that I was to do with them as I thought best.

Towards the last she said to me, "God has shown me that I shall have no more pain."

She had no more acute pain after that.

One morning, a few days before she died, she said to me: "I went home last night. I went over the whole house, and I saw them all, but no one saw me, and I saw Lindo." [1]

Essex, her adored Essex, could not go to her. She was expecting a child, which was born shortly before Hester died, and was called Stella, in remembrance of her.

She longed to see Victoria again, her companion from childhood, the nearest to her in age. But it could not be. Victoria had to remain at home to sustain Mother, who bore with fearful courage the slow death of her youngest child at a distance from her.

In her delirium Hester grieved over Victoria and called to her. And, at

[1] My Spanish poodle.

last, I laid in her hand a tall white jonquil and said: "This is Victoria."

And she kissed the flower many times and was pacified. And then, after a time of semi-unconsciousness lying with the flower still in her hand, her eyes fell on it, and she said: "This is Victoria," and kissed it again.

And, at last, on a dim March morning, a little before the dawn, the nurse came for Diana and me, and we found Hester sitting propped high against her pillows ready to depart. She knew that she was really going at last, and I think she felt nothing but joy.

She said: "Pray for me."

I tried to pray aloud, thinking it was her wish. But she said: "I can't follow." So I was silent.

She spoke no word after that.

Presently she leaned her thin cheek against her hand, as I had seen her do a hundred times when she was reading, and her face became fixed in a great

and awed concentration. She gave her whole attention to something beyond our ken. Her breathing became slower and slower. We did not know when the end had come, so gently, so beautifully did it come.

And then her small worn face relaxed, and a faint colour came to her cheek, and we saw that the longed-for goal was reached at last. It seemed too good to be true.

HESTER'S WORK

V

HESTER'S WORK

I HAVE gleaned together a little sheaf, extracts in prose and verse, from the great pile of Hester's manuscripts. These extracts show (I hope) different facets of her restless, indomitable mind, the closeness of her observation, her determination to make her own judgments, her tendency to tilt at windmills.

She was by nature a free lance and a rebel, and she had her fling, half fierce, half humorous, wholly sarcastic, at the fixed standards and the conventional religious opinions of her day. Anything which she suspected of being conventional was to her as a red rag to a bull. Her little world was in consequence found to be liberally

festooned with red rags. But the problems and windmills and red rags were those of twenty-five years ago. As one reads her pages to-day their audacity seems to have faded with their ink.

I have said little about her religion in the foregoing memoir, and shall add here no quotations from the many sheets devoted to it in her diary. It was, like all else in her, passionate and absorbing; and like her other emotions, it inflicted pain upon her. She suffered from depression and self-upbraiding, but never—so her diary testifies on every page—from the greatest pain of all, a shaken faith.

I have given her verses last of all because the windflower fragrance of her spirit seems to pervade them, and it is just that impression of supreme delicacy and refinement which I trust may remain with the reader when he closes this short record of a short day's work.

Extracts

Sympathy should mean strength imparted, and to give strength we must have strength, for as Amiel says: "What others claim from us is not our thirst and our hunger, but our bread and our gourd."

I do not think tactful people are ever very touchy. . . . They know where to be lenient.

Tact may be acquired, and the first step towards it is to practise unselfishness. If we are thinking of our own comforts or wants, if we are self-conscious, there is no room for the wants and comforts of others, and tact is an impossibility.

What we often regard as trivial ornamental graces are really only great virtues and great principles in perspective. In disclaiming tact we disclaim unselfishness; in saying that we cannot show sympathy, we publish our own cold-heartedness.

Heaven *only* knows the value of a bigot. They have done some of the greatest work in the world. For one instance only, look at Luther! It needs a narrow mind, concentrated on one point, to drive any work through opposition and difficulty, to stick to that work and that alone, till it is completed. . . . Those who see very clearly cannot be expected to see very much.

There is a time for all things, but no time for anything that has not been done in its proper time.

Great men make little ones think.

If, as Smiles says, man represents the brains of humanity and woman the heart, *she* has as little right to neglect the culture of her *mind* as *he* that of his *heart.*

I put down a list of about twenty of my acquaintance, mostly elderly men and women of a settled position and status in life, and then wrote against each what qualities to my mind made them ill or good-mannered. . . . What

I gained from this was that the chief enemy of the good manners that sets at ease, after inability by nature, was self-consciousness—self in any form.

There is nothing so rude as to question.

A judicious suppression of unnecessary truths, invariable courtesy, these need practice. . . . It is provincial to speak out on all occasions what you may think. . . . I wonder if it ever strikes those people who are always in a hurry that they are ill-mannered.

From an essay on George Eliot:

Her books are so very real that they almost take the place of experience. . . . One has followed, and has been led intentionally to follow, so closely the development of the characters and their thoughts, feelings, and actions consequent on them, in difficulties and troubles, that we seem to have experienced the things ourselves, and they range themselves in our past as acquired knowledge.

From an essay on *Pendennis*:

Pendennis is certainly not a hero, though the character of leading interest in the book. . . . Pen is weak, selfish, extravagant, almost unprincipled. . . , I own to liking him, for there is something generous and honest about him, but he is nevertheless contemptible. Thackeray does not wish us to consider him a hero; he says. . . . "I show you a man and call him a man. . . . He does not claim to be a hero, but only a man and a brother," and I am glad he is not mine.

From an essay on *A Tale of Two Cities*:

Dickens's sentiment is peculiar to himself, and by no means his best point. Charles's and Lucie's last parting is forced, and their words unnatural to the last degree; and Dickens has marred Carton's death by the episode of the little seamstress in the last chapter. . . . The sentiment is not true, there

is no refinement. Carton would not have spoken or acted like that; he would have spoken and acted well, but not as Dickens has made him.

Written in answer to an invitation to estimate Keble's rank as a poet:

I am not a great admirer of Keble, even as a writer of religious verse, but as a poet I find it still harder to recognise him. If his thought and religious opinions do not suit me, the fault is perhaps mine, but when considering him as a poet I hardly think any one could place him very high. He has sincerity, deep devotion and earnestness, which go a long way to make a poet, and he has a useful, though not a lively imagination. The logical thread of his poems is very good, and his thought attractive and elevating to those who like it. But no good poet would continually use such hackneyed phrases and artificial terms; he is verbose too, flowery and affected and full of fine-sounding flowing lines, the

sense of which is obscure. The following verse has puzzled me:

> He loves when age and youth are met,
> Fervent old age and youth serene,
> Their high and low in concord set
> For sacred song, joy's golden mean.[1]

His repetition is most irritating; such words as "pastoral," "darkling," "balmy," and "cheerly," recur continually. For example "vernal" occurs in such variations as, vernal skies, vernal green, vernal wreath, vernal bower, vernal rapture. We have too all kinds of bowers, ambrosial, willow, tranquil, native, leafless, Sion's and Eden's bowers. Keble seems also to adapt his thoughts to suit his rhymes, which frequently gives a forced and rather disjointed sound to his verse.

I cannot place him high as a poet. I agree with Arnold; he has a "want of poetical depth." Arnold, too, says justly his "expression is often negligent, the imagery sometimes tawdry."

Another fault, much censured in modern poets, Keble indulges in strongly.

[1] "St. Simon and St. Jude."

He runs from line to line and verse to verse without any stop, or only with a comma. The poem for the Tuesday before Easter is a good, or rather bad example of this. The subject, however, and the deep reverence redeems every poem in the book and almost disarms criticism.

Had Keble been simpler in expression and condensed his thought, not diluted it, his rank as poet would have been higher.

The *Christian Year* owes its popularity to its religious sentiments, not to its worth as a volume of poems.

SHORT STORY

I GIVE next in its entirety a short story which is representative of Hester's mind, and which is, I consider, on the whole the best among the many she wrote.

As I re-read it I remember, and I hope her readers will remember also, that she was not more than twenty-one, probably less, when she wrote it. She would have revised some of her sarcastic judgments had she lived. But those of us who remember our own youth will recall its ignorance, its fire of enthusiasm, its intolerance, its burning sincerity, and they will perhaps—as I do—find the reflection of their youth in Hester's sarcastic, vivid sketch, and feel a sympathy with it which the story itself might fail to evoke.

Swept and Garnished

Even so shall it be also unto this evil generation.—*St. Matthew* xii. 45.

PART I

He had become absolutely unbearable. I had put up with him for a long time; I had lodged, boarded, and made a friend of him, and now I at last found that there was no longer any pleasure in his society. My house was not large, in fact it consisted only of one small room, and when one is at close quarters with a person for some time I always think it is difficult to keep on good terms. It was not that I really disliked him so much, as that I had grown very tired of him; his conversation ceased to interest and amuse me, and his songs and jokes palled upon me. Besides, he took up a great deal too much of my space and made my room untidy. When he first came he had laughed at my little possessions, especially those that my mother had given me as a child, for which I had always preserved a

kind of reverence, though I had not found them very useful. In those days he was excessively witty, at least I thought so, and he certainly knocked my things about in a way that invariably made me laugh. When he broke any of my small *objets d'art* he mended them so artistically and added so much of his own material to them, that really in the end they seemed to be more his than mine. Any articles broken quite beyond repair, like some of my mother's little kneeling figures, he replaced with something so new and grotesque that I could not be angry with him.

For a long time I was content, but one day it dawned upon me that, roughly speaking, my house was hardly my own. The decisive moment had arrived when it became necessary to show that I alone was the master. So I civilly requested him to depart, and to leave me and my furniture to ourselves, as—I put the matter plainly—I was tired to death of him. He was a good-natured fellow, and he took it very well, said he quite understood,

but yet he didn't go. I then saw that it would be my painful duty to turn him out. My house stands alone on a waste piece of ground overlooking sand-dunes, where only coarse rush grasses grow, and the stiff sickly tinted sea holly. At a little distance are a few spare fir-trees, in which a wind is always moaning, though it never reaches me here, even on the hottest day. We stood together on the hearth and looked each other in the face.

"Now listen to me," I said frankly, "when we met some years ago you were altogether a different fellow; you were more lively and amusing and you had more spirit. You *know* I only took you in because you were a good companion and could make the time pass easily. But now you are decidedly dull and stupid; you have grown older and I don't seem to care about you as I did. So you must go."

He listened attentively.

"I think it is you who grow older," he said, "I don't age much, as the Sphinx said to the man; but that is neither here nor there."

"It is very much here," I replied sternly. "I am a comparatively young man, and I must make the best of what I have, of my house and possessions, while they are mine. In my position it is necessary to be a respected member of society and to follow the customs of the day. I must marry, as I believe a wife and children add to the general effect, but I can't while you take up so much room in the house."

"This is a lonely spot," he said, not speaking in the least to the point. "The road hither is broad, but there seem to be few of your old friends who find it. It would be dull work living here alone!"

"Not if one is sufficient to oneself," I said, and I took him by the shoulder and turned him out of the door. I got rid of him with more ease than I had expected, and watched him slouch away over the sand-dunes and disappear in the waterless waste that lay beyond. "Now," I thought, "there will be some peace in the house and some leisure, and I shall sort all my possessions and tidy up the place." The excitement of

such a decided step seemed to have braced me up, and when I returned to my house I was ready to work. My critical eye fell on the garden. The sand had encroached, and all the flowers and plants were dead long ago.

"He never professed to be a gardener," I said to myself, "and of course *I* had no time for such trivial matters."

When I opened the door I was much surprised to find that my little room was quite empty; there was positively no furniture in it of any kind, and only heaps of dust and dirt about the place. "That's what comes of having a bad character in the house," I thought, and I began to set things to rights. I found a bucket and brush in one corner covered with dust, so I swept the room carefully, washed the floor, and raked the ashes out of the grate. The fire had gone out some years before, and the locality was so warm that I had found it unnecessary to light it again. The wall paper was all hanging in strips, but I cleverly patched it up with the leaves of a prayer-book which I dis-

covered amidst the rubbish. I made my room very neat and clean, but it required furniture, and that I knew was of all things the easiest to procure. So I went to the Big Shop, where I had been originally introduced by my Father and Mother, when, the time having come that I was of an age to keep house for myself, a kindly old man in lawn sleeves had provided me with a little outfit. So I naturally went back there. I knew they kept everything in stock. I did not exactly know what I wanted, but I did know that that was the only place where it was to be got, for I had been frequently told that any goods not stamped by their trade-mark, a full-grown oak in a flower-pot, were spurious imitations only. I was particularly well received, though I had not been there for a long time—indeed my absence had been quite noticed. When I explained my wants I found that the very young shopman who served me understood all about it, indeed more than I did myself, and offered to come over and help me personally to refurnish. I

demurred at this—I said I should like to have the advice of an older man, and looked about for the one who had originally helped me to get my little kit together. But several of the shop assistants quickly came up and assured me that the lads were the ones nowadays, who were up to all the latest dodges; they knew all the old men's secrets of the trade and a good many more besides, and naturally had much better heads for mounting on ladders than their elders. So I told the young man he might come over in the morning and bring his own selection with him.

He arrived early next day and was most genial and took a great deal of interest, but he did not like the use I had made of the prayer-book. He said it ought not to have been put to any practical use of that kind, or indeed of any kind, without the help of clerical mucilage, of which he had brought a bottle. We went over the price list together and I was quite astonished to find how cheap everything was. Most of the articles were to be had on applica-

tion, especially the most costly, or were to be given away with a pound of tea. It struck me that the owner would have been rather surprised at the way in which his stores were freely handed out, but the young man assured me with a smile that he, the owner, had given them absolute authority over the contents of the whole shop, and the monopoly of all the principal necessaries of life.

"Has he no other centres of trade but this one?" I asked out of curiosity.

"None," he answered. "People will tell you that there are others, and that he supplies most communities; but this is on the face of it unjust, and besides we ourselves have gone into the subject, and know for certain that he is only connected with us, which is of course a matter of grave satisfaction to us."

We did a great deal that day. We washed everything with the new clerical Sapolio, which takes out spots of all kinds and gives every article it touches the same shiny appearance, which the young man called "orthodox." It was

a word he was very fond of, but I do not now know what it means.

As we were hard at work, the door opened and an old man looked in. I recollected having seen him the day before behind the counter in the Shop, when I had noticed that he watched me as I was talking to my young friend. He looked round in silence and sighed.

"Sweeping and garnishing?" he asked.

"Rather!" said the young man from his superior position on the top of a high ladder.

"I have seen a good deal of that in my day," pursued the old man. "But for whom is it being done?"

"Goodness me!" I said, "of course it is for myself. Who else is there here?"

"No one at present certainly," said the old man. I don't think he even noticed the youth on the steps. He shook his head and went out. I disliked the old fossil extremely.

In a very short time my whole house was refitted from ceiling to floor. I

should not have known it again. I must say I found it most inconvenient, but the young man assured me the taste was absolutely correct, and that if it lacked individuality it was because that was the very thing I must avoid in future. At last he took leave, warmly shaking me by the hand and begging me to come to him if anything went wrong, or if I was in doubt as to the use of any of the goods he had supplied, or if the little patent oil-lamp went out, which now quite superseded the daylight, since that had been effectually obscured by the stained-glass windows.

I was sitting alone in my renovated dwelling on the first afternoon after its completion, wishing that I knew how to boil a kettle on my new gas stove, when a tap came at the door. It was the old man from the shop again. He looked so anxious and careworn that I could not forbid his coming in, though he entered with great diffidence, so unlike the assured manners of my young friend.

"Take a seat," I said, "you will find me very clean and tidy," and I waved

him towards one of the straight-backed chairs.

"I had rather stand," he said. "You have been making great alterations here," he added hesitatingly. "I hope you find yourself comfortable. And where is the friend who used to live with you?"

"Oh, he is gone," I said. "I was tired of him!"

"But are you not rather lonely here by yourself?"

"Well, I'm naturally fond of company," I replied.

"Yes," he said, "that's just it. You want a home, not a house, and it takes two to make a home. You don't want the old friend back, I suppose?"

"My dear sir, look at my things. Do you think I want him here, knocking nails into all my new furniture! I wouldn't have him back at any price. I was foolish enough to be fond of him once, but my friendship for him is quite superseded."

"By what?"

I hesitated. I waved my hand to the furniture.

He sighed. "My son," he said, "is it not written, *Only that which is replaced is destroyed*," and he went away again, a tottering old figure across the sand-dunes and I have never seen him since.

PART II

I found my new life very dull and slow, but consoled myself with the thought that it would be considered the correct thing. That, it appeared, was henceforth to be the invariable test I was to apply to the actions of myself and others.

For something to do I went to work in the garden, but my best clothes were tight and uncomfortable, and the weather was unusually cold, so I soon came in. The gas stove had gone out in the meantime, and I went to the old grate and tried to recollect what a fire was made of, and how one lit it. As the evening drew in I began to think of the friend I had turned out, and to wonder how he was getting on.

"It's a thirsty, comfortless place,

that desert," I said. "I travelled there once for some time before I settled down here, and I didn't fancy it. He did not seem to mind going, though; he always 'was good-natured. What a genial cheerful companion he used to be in the old days. But no! a man of my age cannot always keep up with these wild young spirits. One gets beyond their crude ideas and wants. As one grows older one aspires after higher things; one longs for respect, for true friendship, the intimacy and consideration of our social superiors—in fact, for a more real and fuller life." I looked round my room with complacency. Though lonely and uncongenial, my life was infinitely preferable to what it had been when I was continually annoyed by an officious friend, whom old acquaintances did not seem to like, and who had latterly become very tyrannical.

I sat meditating. The long summer twilight was closing in. There was a great silence everywhere—no sound outside, yet when I looked up I was much startled to see a dim green face looking

in at the little stained-glass window. It was a familiar face, and it disappeared when it saw that I saw. I was annoyed that he should have come back so soon, when I hardly knew as yet whether I liked being alone. I did not care to see him, so I sat on and took no notice. When I looked again at the window there was no one there.

"He's gone," I thought. "Must have seen he was not wanted."

There was a light sound at the door and the latch was noiselessly raised and fell again, for I had shot the bolt. I went to it and listened. Perhaps it was not he.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing," replied my friend's voice. "I only came to see how you were getting on."

"Very well indeed," I said emphatically. "But you must not come and look in at my window like that. It startles a man excessively. I've done with you, remember. I don't know you. Go away."

"Come, come; one does not forget old friends so easily. It is not pleasant

wandering there in the desert. There's no water and the sun is very hot, and when the night comes there is nowhere to rest, for the holly pricks me at every turn when I lie down. Let me in and we will be good friends again as of old."

"No, no, you forget that you and I are strangers now; you must not be seen coming here. They would not like it at the Shop. I have refurnished my house and I am a changed man in consequence."

"Had many visitors?" he went on.

"Not many," I said bitterly. "You know that ever after you came here my friends ceased to come."

"Got any one inside there?"

"No, no one. I like to be alone."

"What have you been doing in the garden?" he asked sharply.

"Tidying up," I replied. "I have been doing the same indoors."

"Let's see," he said. Unconsciously I had drawn the bolt and opened the door a little way. My poor, ugly friend, there was something pleasant, something pathetic about him after all!

"You may just look in for a minute,"

I said cautiously, "but mind, you must not stop."

"Oh dear no, of course not," he said, and peered round in the gathering dimness.

"Nice, isn't it?" I remarked with pride. "Cleaner than it used to be, and very tastefully arranged!"

"I smell soap," he said, and drew back, his nose contracting fastidiously.

"The smell will soon wear off," I replied; "it is a very harmless kind of soap, and is warranted to have nothing dangerous in its composition. You need not be afraid of it."

"I don't like it," he pursued. "I think I'll be going. Got an engagement with a few friends."

"You need not hurry," I said. "You may think it odd, but, to tell you the truth, I find it very poor fun having no one to speak to. And all that brandy we had got lost in the cleaning, and there were one or two other things I missed as well—in fact there seems to be nothing left to pass the time with. Now I don't wish you to come back for good, but you might just look in from

time to time after dark. There could be no possible harm in that, and we could talk over old times, you know. Must go, must you? Good evening."

He went and I stood at the door, for the air was certainly milder—it often is after sunset—and watched him walk away. The red light in the west still glowed like a furnace which was red-hot somewhere round the corner, and the sighing firs on the distant ridge stood black against it, and the tall loose-limbed figure of the man showed in sharp contrast, and then disappeared. The coarse grass creaked on the sand, the evening grew oppressive and I was glad I had lit no fire. I left the door ajar and sat down again in my empty abode, and sighed for the old pleasant days of companionship and carouse. I had grown very weary of this life, as I had once grown weary of my companion. I pined for new and interesting experiences, I hardly knew or minded what, so long as they were not what I had had before. Cleaning and housework were all very well for women and enthusiastic young people, but that

sort of thing could not last with a person like myself. Besides, what did one gain by all this trouble?—not happiness certainly. The effects were very thin and transient to what I had been led to expect. The clean smell of paint and soap had already become nauseous to me, and seemed to take away the pleasure of living in one's own house. At last I went and found the soap and threw it away among the sand-dunes, I kicked a hole in the bucket and pitched the broom into a tree, and then I felt more easy.

The night had fallen now, and the moon was rising like a partially bitten biscuit in the south. I sat down wearily and looked out through the door over the grey sands to the stretching dunes. The firs cast heavy shadows, which almost seemed alive as they swayed and danced upon the sand. Were there figures moving amongst them? My friend and his friends perhaps! I did not like the idea and turned away from the dim scene. What if they should come to visit me to-night! How should I keep them out? I should be at their

mercy! I did not want to see them, they were hardly suitable friends for a respectable man to have. I would bolt the door again at any rate and see if that would keep them out. I turned round. There had been no sound of steps, and yet—yet there was a figure at the door looking in, with its familiar face, and its fat white hand on the latch. It was all over now. I sat down with a ghastly smile, and he held the door narrowly open, and one, two, three, four, five, six, seven—seven friends all passed in swiftly behind him, and each sat solemnly down on an impromptu chair, which rose to the occasion round the room. There was a table, too, in the centre with wine and fruit and cards and dice, and when they were all seated my friend shut the door, bolted it carefully, came to the head of the table and exclaimed in a grave voice, "Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

Then we all looked at each other and burst into a shout of laughter, in which I joined as loudly as the rest. We

talked and drank late, and I was the noisiest and wildest of all.

. . . . . .

I had made quite a foolish mistake. Any one might have said that I had been mad for the time,—but I am sane enough now. The fuller, more exhilarating life has come to me in my friends. It was not to be found in single brotherhood, or in severe soap-and-water solitude, but in the free give-and-take of eight or nine choice spirits, living together in unbroken harmony. For they came that night for good, and have never left me since. My room is certainly small and at present quite full of all kinds of queer things, but we are none of us particular. We are those kindred souls that stick closer than brothers, and "the more the merrier," as the Psalmist says.

EXTRACTS IN VERSE

Nature's Mistakes

What strange mistakes
Old Nature makes!
She gives the robes and crown
Unto a clown;
And mighty-minded poverty rebels
Against its cap and bells;
She gives a soldier's gear
To knock-kneed fear;
And lets the surplicé cover
The battle-lover;
The wig and gown bespeak
The ultra meek.
Nature flings all these mantles on awry,
Ignoring all reply.

To ——

God gave thee a strange beauty in thy face,
That *is* not yet thy face,
But dwelleth *in* thy face.
Thou hast a better beauty and a better mind
Than fall to most men's share.
Thou hast no worldly beauty,
But that look which speaks,
Which is the outcome of a noble heart,
Of a great mind, and a great intellect,
Of a great soul, of trustfulness and good.
It is not strange that thou shouldst be so much,
And yet shouldst be so young.
Thy face explaineth all,
And thy strange, absent eyes.

In Loving Memory
of a dear Dutch Plate, much
Valued and
much Lamented

Here lie the shattered fragments of a
Plate.
No human skill, no rivet, nor cement
Can raise it to its former perfect state.
The crack of doom announced the sad
event.
Then let us bury its remains, and say
Those sad words "Earth to earth—and
clay to clay!"

O WEARY middle-age,
  Grievous time to live,
For him who doth receive,
  But has naught to give.

WE scheme our own undoing,
  And bitter is the page
Where we must read our failure
  By the dim light of age.

Young Hope

Young Hope sang beside the fire
When Spring days were cold;
Wandered out when Summer came,
Singing as of old;
Dropped his song when Autumn set
Wood and heath aglow;
Dumb before the Winter blast
Perished in the snow,

TWILIGHT

I

THIS the hour of sombre light—
Verge of day, and verge of night;
When that grey-hooded Capuchin
Leads day out and leads day in.

II

Twilight thoughts with close of day
Come and tint the mind with grey;
But the sad dark thoughts of night
Grow still lighter with the light.

Plagiarism

The thrushes have stolen my songs,
And are singing them under the heaven,
Out in the woodlands at dawn,
Out in the gardens at even.
My songs and my thoughts by the thrushes
Are published abroad in the land;
The utt'rance for which my soul longeth
Is the only one they can command.

I LOVE no more the things I see—
Thy sunshine is a mockery,
O sky.
Have I once believèd thee
Ere thy brightness grievèd me?
O life,
Why hast *thou* deceived me,
Oh, why?

O Self, thy counsel was unsound,
Thy word, thy promise I have found
A lie.
The reel of hope is now unwound,
And I
Can but sink helpless to the ground,
And die.

Oh, Tarry, Yellow Leaves

I

Oh, tarry, yellow leaves,
  Upon the tree.
My spirit ever grieves
  To lie along with thee.
And if thou fallest ere I die,
Unshrouded by thee shall I lie.

II

Oh, haste thee, gentle Death!
  I cannot wait
For thy slow-drawing breath.
  It is not yet too late;—
My shroud still rustles on the tree!
Haste! any breath may set them free.

There are some unfinished lines beginning:

"Here is the little candle now gone out
That once was Hester."

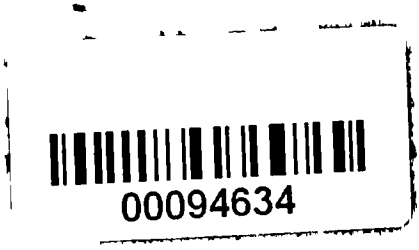
Afterwards I found she had rewritten them, and I give them as she finally left them:

EPITAPH

A LITTLE candle, feeble, blown about
By all life's winds of care, and gusts of doubt,
Flickered and swerved a time, and then went out.

THE END

Printed by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ld., London and Aylesbury, England.



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on 28 December, 2018